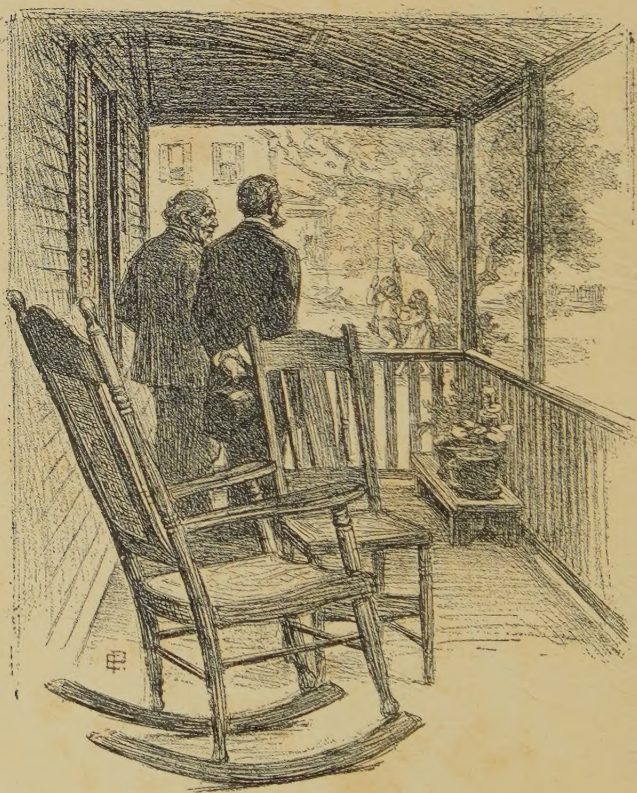


SONNY'S FATHER



SONNY'S FATHER



I tell you, Doc', it's a great an' awful thing to be inherited.

SONNY'S FATHER

IN WHICH THE FATHER, NOW BECOME GRANDFATHER, A KINDLY OBSERVER OF LIFE AND A GENIAL PHILOSOPHER, IN HIS DESULTORY TALKS WITH THE FAMILY DOCTOR, CARRIES ALONG THE STORY OF SONNY.

BY

RUTH M^cENERY STUART

Author of "Sonny, a Christmas Guest," "Napoleon Jackson, the Gentleman of the Plush Rocker," "Aunt Amity's Silver Wedding," etc.

Illustrated



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SONNY'S FATHER

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I

A MISFIT CHRISTMAS



WELL, well, well! Ef there ain't the doctor! At the steps befo' I discovered him! That 's what I get for standin' on step-ladders at my time o' life. Ef you 'd 'a' been a brigand you 'd 'a' had me, Doc — both hands up.

I was tempted o' the heathen by these big Japanese persimmons. Here, lay these on the banister-rail for me, Doc — an' look out! Don't taste 'em, 'lessen you want yo' mouth fixed to whistle. That puckerin' trick runs in the family.

Yas, they 're smooth an' handsome, but gimme the little ol' woods persimmon, seedy an' wrinkled an' sugared by the frost, character lines all over its face — same as a good ol' Christian.

Merry Christmas, ol' friend! — ef it is three days after.

This first shake is for "Merry Christmas," an' this is for thanks for yo' Christmas gif'. It did seem to be about the only one thet amounted — no, I won't say that, neither. They was all well-meant an' kind, an' I 've been on the edge of cryin' all day, thess to think — although —

But come along into my room an' see the things. Oh, yas; I reckon it was a sort of "ovation" to celebrate my seventy-fifth Christmas this-a-way an' to make it a surprise party, at that.

It seems thet Mary Elizabeth, Sonny's wife, give out along in the summer thet this was to be my seventy-fifth Christmas, an' invited accordin'ly — all the village an' country-side. She jest give it out promiscuous, tellin' everybody thet the only person thet *was n't* to know about it was me — *on pain of not havin' it*. That was what you might call a stroke of ingeniousness. They ain't a person in the county thet would miss havin' an unusual thing like that, an' so the secret was pretty safe-t.

She never wrote no invitations. She 'd

thess tell every person she met to instruct the next one. So nobody's feelin's was hurted. She declares she never hinted about presents; but it must 'a' been in her voice an' her intimations unbeknownst to herself, for not a mother's son or daughter come empty-handed.

'Sh-h-h! I notice the sewin'-machine has stopped an' she might —

But I tell you here — 'sh! — I say, I tell you, doc, *I can't turn around in my own room.* An' sech ridic — I tell you, *I never was so miserable in my life!*

Oh, of course, they's exceptions. There's yo' present, f'r instance. Sech a pocket-knife as that — why, it's a heredity! I've got it down in my will a'ready — that is to say, I've got it codiciled to my namesake. What you say? Oh, no; I would n't have no child named Deuteronomy, the way Sonny an' I was. I 'm come to a reelization of it.

He an' Mary Elizabeth, why, they offered it through excess of devotional feelin'. I see you recall the circumstance now. He's named after a certain auburn-haired doctor — an' yet, as I say, he's my namesake — named something else,

for my sake. We jes call 'im Doc for short.

Yas, he 'll get that knife, though I hope to season it a little an' get the blades wore down some before he receives it.

It was real white in you to send sech a thing as that. A person might 'a' supposed thet you 'd 'a' sent a fresh box o' porous plasters, or maybe a bottle o' lithia tab—

Why, no; of co'se I did n't fear it. How could I — an' be surprised? But ef I had been anticipatin' the party, I 'd 'a' thought o' yo' drug-sto' show-case, an' they ain't never anything appetizin' in it to me. You cert'n'y deserve credit not even to select sech a thing as a hammock or a head-rest, although ef you had, I 'd never 'a' questioned it.

Yes, I got a few head-rests, some stuffed with hops an' some with balsam, an' one poor neck-roll perfumed with something turrible — asafetida, I reckon. I 've laid that out to sun. Mary Elizabeth says they 're good to ward off whoopin'-cough, an' I told her I 'd rather have the whoopin'-cough than it.

Oh, yas; the party was fine, an', as I

said, they was a lump in my throat from the arrival of the first visitor, although it was Moreland Howe, an' you know I never hankered after Moreland. I reckon the reason my throat lumped up so at him comin' was the thought thet *even* Moreland had come to wish me joy. You see, he give my emotions a back lick — an' it 's thess like 'im.

He brought me that ridic'lous thing hangin' from the swingin' lamp over my readin'-table in the hall there. What you say? "What is it?" God knows, doctor, an' he ain't told me. I suspicion it 's thess a sort o' *eye-ketcher*, — to be looked at, — although I 'd ruther look at almost anything I know. It 's a thing thet, ef a person was anyways nervous, would either help him or hender him. He might find ease in tryin' to count the red an' purple worsted tassels, or the flies thet light on 'em; but ef he did, seem to me he would come to realize thet there was holes in the perforated paper thet could n't be counted, an' — well, I don't like to discuss it. It 's the kind o' thing *she* or *I* never liked — not thet I 've ever seen its exact match.

The only use *she* ever had for perforated

paper was to make crosses for pulpit book-marks — an' I 've made 'em myself whilst she 'd be darnin', thess startin' with one row o' between-holes an' cuttin' each one bigger until the desired size was reached, an' then pastin' 'em one on top o' the other, accordin' to size, so 's the middle would rise up like sculpture. Then they 're fastened on to the ends of ribbins to hang out in view o' the congregation. Now, there 's a useful thing — an' suitable.

You know, Moreland was engaged to be married once-t, an' I suspicion thet this dangle is one of his engagement presents thet he 's had laid away. I 've got a conspiracy in my mind thet 'll rid me of it — in time. I 'm goin' to tech it over keefully with what attraction I can scrape off o' fly-paper, quick as spring opens, an' when Moreland sees how they 've ruined it, why, I 'll drop it in the stove — *with regrets*.

He 's dropped in twice-t a'ready sence it 's hung there, thess to enjoy it, although he ain't crossed this threshold before but once-t in three year.

I tell you, doctor, they 's nothin' thet stimulates friendship like givin'. Re-

ceivin' is cheap compared to it, ez the Bible declares.

Yes, but we were mighty sorry you could n't come to the party, doctor; an' ef it had been anything but another birthday occasion thet kep' you away, we 'd 'a' made a row about it. Of course the babies, bless their hearts! they must have all the attention thet they can't demand.

I tell you, things are a heap more equalized in this world than short-sighted mortals can discern.

But you ain't seen the bulk o' the presents yet, doctor. Wait a minute tel I have time to put on my hypocritical smile an' I 'll take you in. We 'll be ap' to meet Mary Elizabeth, an' I owe it to her particularly to be as deceitfully cheerful as I can over it; in fact, I owe it to all them thet took part in it.

I would n't mind it so much ef I could shet my room door an' get into bed an' see the interior landscape thet I'm used to, but —

'Sh-h-h! I hear her slippers. She 's heared you an' she 's comin' out.

Here 's doctor, daughter. An' I 'm thess takin' 'im in to view my purties.

So now, I s'pose my popularity is in a manner proved, as you say, an' it 's all mighty fine an' gratifyin'. But after I 've lived with my constituency for a while, so to speak, I 'm goin' to get you to separate 'em, Mary Elizabeth, an' let the whole house feel it. No, don't say a word! It 's got to be done. Do you think I 'm that selfish thet I 'd appropriate all the combined popularity of daughter an' son *an'* gran'child'en!

The truth is, Doc, this has got to be a turrible popular house sence Sonny has been elected school director an' little Marthy is old enough to have a choice o' hair-ribbins.

An' Mary Elizabeth she always was popular. An' I see she 's lookin' at her watch: we 're keepin' 'er too long. I s'pose a watch gets looked in the face the first week of its ownership often enough to lose countenance forever except it knew it would have plenty of retirement, later on. Most ladies' watches lead lives of leisure.

Yas, I give it to her. I think every lady should have a good gold watch an' chain, ef for nothin' else on account o' the children rememberin' " ma with her watch an'

chain.” An’ the various daguerreotypes looks well with ’em. It ’s a part o’ gentility, a lady’s watch is, whether it ’s kep’ wound up or not.

An’ in case o’ breakin’ up a home, a watch looks well on the inventory. Little Marthy — her grandma’s namesake — of course she ’s got *hers*, an’ it ain’t no mean timepiece, neither. It ’s got a live purple amethyst on one side, an’ the chain goes around twice-t — an’ ef the day comes when she wants to take my old picture out o’ the case an’ put in a younger man’s, I ’ll be that much better pleased to know thet joy stays with us, along with time.

I wonder ef that ain’t a purty fair joke, doctor, for a seventy-fiver — settin’ amongst his troubles, too.

I ’m glad she slipped away. She ’s sech a modest little thing — went thess as soon as I referred to her popularity. I would n’t ’a’ wanted her to stay an’ look over my presents with you. It ’d ’a’ made me tongue-tied. Come along, Doc. That ’s right. You lif’ *that* an’ I ’ll pull *this* back whilst I shet the door with my foot.

I tried to open that door yesterday from my bed the way I ’ve always done, but by

the time I 'd got the things out o' the way they was n't anything left to use but my teeth, an' ruther than resk my plate on that glass door-knob I got up an' h'isted a few things on to the bed — an' the rebellion thet came into my heart I 'd like to forget. I 've doubted the doctrine of total depravity all my life, as you know, but maybe it 's so, after all — in my case, at least. I reckon, like as not, all doctrines is true, more or less, in some lights, or else so many people would n't see their ways to believin' 'em.

The way I 've sinned over these presents has filled me with regretful remorse.

Look out! Don't step! Wait a minute! Some o' the children has wound it up. I hear it whir. Here it comes from under the bed. We must 've shook the floor. What do you think o' that, now? Sir? Why, it 's said to be a seed-counter. Jim Bowers brought it. He says thet when it travels that-a-way it 's prowlin' for food an' it craves peas an' beans to count.

What 's that you say? " Did I give it any? " No, I did n't. Not a one. I was too nettled to give Jim that satisfaction. I know it 's some dod-blasted patent thet

he 's been took in with, an' he thought thet bein' as I was in my second childhood, I 'd be tickled over it — an' I got contrary.

I really wouldn't care so much ef the thing was n't so all-fired big. It takes up as much floor-room as a chair, an' I 'm compelled to keep it in sight — for a while.

Who in thunder wants seeds counted, even ef the fool thing could do it? It 's more like a toe-snatcher, to me; an' I intend to have it chained to the table-leg, a safe-t distance from my bed. I never did like the idee of havin' my bare feet nabbed in the dark.

Our littlest he 's mighty mischievious, an' no doubt he heared me an' you start to come in, an' he 's sneaked in an' wound up — Look out, there! I say he 's been in here an' wound up things. That ain't nothin' but a mechanical rooster, but you don't want to step on it. See him stretch his neck an' — did you ever hear anything so ridic'lous! I s'pose I must ac' mighty childish for people to fetch me sech presents. An' yet, I ruther like that rooster. It tickles me to see the way he exerts himself.

Hold on, Doc! That 's on the bureau an'

it can't do you no harm. Yas, he 's wound 'em all up, the little scamp, an' like as not he 's watchin' us from somewheres.

Thess to think, Doc, thet we was boys once-t. It 's the fullest-to-the-brim of happiness of all the cups of life, boyhood is, I do believe.

Don't start! Thet 's thess a donkey savin's-bank, an' it 'll "yee-haw!" that-a-way now tel a nickel 's dropped in its slotted ear. He 's the family favoryte of all the presents, an' he 's heavy with money a'ready. What 's that you say? "He 'll bray tel he runs down"?' But he don't never run down—not within the limit of human endurance.

They say they 're the best money-savers on the market. They 're so ridic'lous, 'most anybody 'll spend a little change to see 'em perform. The feller showed his genius in makin' the deposit go to hushin' 'em. He knew thet once-t he got started, a man would give his last cent to silence him. Did you ever hear so much sound out of sech a little — An' his last bray is as loud as his first.

Here, drop this in his ear, for gracious' sakes, so we can talk.

Oh, them? They 're picture-frames constructed out o' chicken-bones.

I s'pose maybe they 's jestice in this museum, but they don't seem to be mercy.

It seems thet a lady down in Ozan has been givin' lessons in makin' 'em. Yas, chicken-bones steeped in diamond dyes; an' they say they 's seventeen kinds o' flowers an' four fruits represented. I ain't studied 'em out yet, but I can see they 've used drumsticks for buds, mostly. An' the neck-j'int, unj'inted, they 're wide-open perrarer-flowers.

The heads is seed-pods, an' so is the popes'-noses; an' I have an idee thet the chrysanthe'ums an' asters is constructed mainly of ribs. Of course it 'd take a number, but on a farm —

Why, yas; I s'pose it is purty — uncommon purty — considerin'; but in things of beauty I don't like to have to consider, an' the thing don't appetize me worth a cent.

Them gum-ball frames, now, an' the sycamores an' pine-cones do very well. But when it comes to framin' my relations, I sort o' like to put my hand in my pocket an' do 'em store-jestice. An' these nature-

frames they ketch dust an' harbor spiders.

Between you an' me, I don't intend to give them graveyard chicken-frames house room more 'n thess so long, an' the only real use I can think to put 'em to is a raffle; so I'll donate 'em to the next county fair to be raffled for expenses. You see, they 'd be suitable for the flower, fruit, *an'* fowl departments, an' they pleg me, thess knowin' they 're here.

Mary Elizabeth she ain't give no opinion of 'em yet, an' she may consider 'em suitable to frame a couple o' stuffed birds she 's got; an' ef she does, why, she 's welcome. She 'd likely gild hers to match the pine-cone frame round her mother. She 's got it trimmed with a piece of her ma's favoryte silk dress, fastened in one corner by a little pin she used to wear. She considers suitableness in everything, Mary Elizabeth does.

These slippers I 've got on was her present. She worked the initials, an' they 're lined with a scrap o' one o' wife's old wool dresses, an' I like to know it.

That new readin'-lamp? Why, Sonny he give me that. The old one was good

enough a-plenty, but it seems thet these new ones have special organdy burners — or no, I reckon it was the old one thet had the organdy burner, an' this one is to wear a mantle, he says. Either one reminds me of *her*, — either the organdy or the mantle, — an', of course, I need the best light now for my night chapter o' the gospel. The little feller — why, he made the stand it sets on, an' the mats was crocheted by the girls.

Oh, I got lots of nice suitable things, an' I appreciate everything, nice or not, exceptin' that seed-counter, an' I never will be reconciled to bein' made cheap of. I hate a fool, even when it 's inanimate.

Yas, that 's a map o' the world. Henry Burgess brought that. Yas, it does seem a nice thing, an' I said so, too, an' I 'm glad I praised it befo' I saw the date on it. After that, I 'd 'a' been compelled either to pervaricate or to fail in politeness, an' it 's always easier to fall on a pillar than into a brier-patch. Good hearted people has to look sharp not to become cheerful liars.

I 've looked for places I know on the map, but it 's either non-committal or I 'm

not observant enough. They don't seem to be no Philippine Islands on it whatsoever, but like as not they was n't thought much of then an' they 're secreted somewhere.

I always did like the look of a wall-map, — when I go into an office or courthouse, — but I doubt whether I 'll ever fully relish this on my own wall. A clock thet won't keep truthful time always plegs me, an' this threatens me the same way.

Oh, no; that ain't to say a toy, exac'ly — that nigger doll on the mantel. It 's a pin-cushion; an' the heathen Chinee, why, he 's a holder of shavin'-paper; an' the stuffed cat it 's a foot-rest. I notice it 's mouse-e't at the corners, so the conno'ziers ain't deceived.

I see somethin' has stole the hickory-nut head o' the toothpick lady a'ready, an' I suspect it 's the flyin'-squirrel I caught sniffin' at her yesterday.

An' that pile o' ribbins? Oh, they 've come off o' all the things. That was the first thing I done, rippin' them off. They 'd ketch in my hands so an' gimme goose-skin the len'th o' my spine.

I 've passed them over to Mary Eliza-

beth, an' she 'll likely work 'em into crazy-patches or hair-ribbins for the girls.

That? Excuse me whistlin'. That 's *whisky*, doctor. An' who do you reckon sent it? Who but Miss Sophia Falena Simpkins, the twin — an' they both teetotalers! Shows their confidence in me.

“ How old is it? ” Well, she allowed it was as old as they was, an' of co'se that stopped my inquiry, but it 's old enough to be treated with respect an' not abuse. Yas, that four-in-hand necktie was tied on its neck — from the other twin. Oh, it 's the reverend stuff, an' that thimble-sized, hat-shaped glass over the cork seems to stand for their maidenly consciences, an' I won't never violate the hint.

That shoe-an'-slipper holder with all the nests in it was sent in by our chapter of the King's Daughters, each daughter contributin' one nest, as I understand it; an' it 's ornamental on the wall, although my one contribution looks middlin' lonesome in it. Of co'se I always have on either my slippers or my boots, an' when I get into bed it 's unhandy to cross the room thess to put either one up in style.

The first night it hung there the children

all come an' put in their shoes for the night, but that was awkward. They had to go out bare-footed.

Yas, the motter is suitable enough. "Rest for tired soles" is about as inoffensive as a motter could well be. An' so is this, on one o' the umbrella-holders, "Wait tel the clouds roll by," although it seems a sort o' misfit for an umbrella. "When it rains it pours" would be more to my mind. Yas, I've got three. "Little drops of water," this one seems to have on it; an' this one says — I never can read them German-tex' letters. What's that you say? "Expansion for protection only"? It's well to be highly educated like you, doctor. I would n't 'a' made that out in a week. It sounds sort o' deep-seated to me, like ez ef more was meant than you see at first? I wonder ef it could refer to politics, some way. "Expansion for protection only." It cert'n'y sounds political. Why, of co'se, Jedge Whittemore, he sent me that — an' he's so opposed to annexin' the Philippines.

Yas, they did fetch a ridic'lous lot o' pen-wipers, for a person o' my sedate habits. I never did fly to the pen much. You

see, when a present is more or less obligatory, why, a pen-wiper is an easy way out. Almost any cloth shape repeated an' tacked in the middle with some sort o' centerpiece, like an odd button, rises into prominence with the look of a present.

Of co'se I *have* wrote letters, from time to time, in days past. I was countin', only last Sunday, the letters I 've wrote in my life, an', includin' my proposal-letter, which I wrote an' handed to her personal, on account o' the paralysis of my tongue — I say, countin' that, I 've wrote seven letters all told; an' I regret to say, one of the seven was writ in anger, an' two in apology for it, so thet they 's only four real creditable letters to my credit, an' one o' the four was n't to say extry friendly, although it sounded well.

That was the one I wrote to Sally Ann, time her first husband, Teddy Brooks, died. Poor Teddy could easy 'a' been kep' livin' along a few years more, ef not permanent, ef he 'd been looked after an' excused from so much motherly cradle service. Of co'se I knew Sally Ann, an' thet she was natchelly a public performer, an' would be readin' 'er letters of consolation out loud

to whoever dropped in, an' I composed it accordin'. An' so she did, for she wrote me thet my note of condolence was the most eloquent of all she got — "so everybody said." She beats the Dutch, Sally Ann does.

I don't suppose she ever took a moment's comfort in seclusion in her life, no more 'n a weather-vane. Poor Sally!

But talkin' about this excessive circulation of presents thet 's come into fashion these last years, I don't approve of it, doctor; an' you know it ain't thet I 'm stingy about doin' my part. I 'll give a present, ef need be, an' I 'll even command the grace to take one, — I seem to 've proved that, — but it 's the principle of the thing thet troubles my mind.

Some of our best-raised girls has got flighty that-a-way after goin' to boa'din'-school, where they learn a heap more 'n Latin verbs an' finishin' behavior. Not thet I don't appreciate what they do acquire. It seems to lift 'em into a higher region of ladyhood, I know, an' it 's a thing you can't locate.

Wife had a year at Hilltop Academy, an' I always thought she showed it, even in

the way she 'd gether eggs in 'er apron, or keep still tel another person quit speakin'. But of co'se they 's boa'din'-schools *an'* boa'din'-schools, an' them thet fosters idle hands I don't approve of; an' the fact thet a parent may be able to pay for it ain't got nothin' to do with the divine responsibility as I see it. The idee of an earthly parent bein' willin' to put up big money to have his own flesh an' blood incapacitated for misfortune!

Oh, yas; they give me considerable books. They 've complimented my education to that extent. This "pronouncin'-Testament," for instance, I seized with delight, hopin' to get the real patriarchal pronunciations. I wanted to see if sech jokes as "Milk-easy-Dick" an' "Knee-high-miah" and "Build-dad-the-shoe-height" was legitimate frivolity, but I ain't had no luck so far. I sort o' wonder what kind of a man would aspire to write a Bible-pronouncer.

You know sence Sonny's taken to writin' books, an' we 've had an author's readin' here, I always seem to discern a person behind every volume.

Yas; they 're usin' several of Sonny's

nature-books in the schools, now, an' he has mo' orders 'n he can fill, but he won't never hurry. You know he never did. He 'll study over a thing tel he 's satisfied with it, before any temptation would induce him to write about it. That 's why he gets sech high prices for what he does. It don't have to be contradicted, an' no pleasure of the imagination will make him lead a dumb beast into behavior thet 's too diplomatic or complicated.

He 's done some jocular experimentin', — set eggs under inappropriate beasts an' sech as that, — but he ain't had no luck. All our beasts-of-a-hair seem to flock together same as birds of a feather. He 'lows thet he 's often seen expressions on our dog's face thet looked like ez ef he might be capable of intrigue or religious exaltation, but Sonny ain't felt justifiable in ascribin' motives thess on his facial indications — not even when it 's backed by the expression of his tail.

You ain't goin'? Well, I 'm a friend to all the sick, so I won't keep you. Yo' visit has done me good, doctor. I always did love to hear you talk. We agree an' disagree thess enough for sugar an' spice.

Oh, yas; it 's been a merry Christmas; no doubt about that. An' the fun ain't fully over, either. I 'll amuse myself with the presents thet 's been adjudged suitable to my mind, when time hangs too heavy. I thought last night thet some time I 'd empty that bottle o' iron pills I never took — I 'd empty 'em into the seed-counter when it was on some of its migrations; an' ef it knew the difference an' spurned to count 'em, I 'd try to have some respect for its intellect.

Good-by, Doc, an' a merry Christmas!

Surely, say it again: "Merry Christmas!" That lasts here tel we can say "Happy New Year!" They say our Christmas laughter was heared clair acrost Chinquepin Creek, an' ol' Mis' Gibbs, settin' there paralyzed in her chair, she laughed with us whilst she enjoyed the basket-dinner Mary Elizabeth sent over to her.

Yas, them 's her cardin'-combs. She could n't come to the surprise party, so she sent them to me. Her hands refuse to hold 'em any longer, an' she allowed no doubt thet I might while away my last moments that-a-way. But of co'se she

did n't know me. I may be old an' child-ish, but even ef I was to turn baby again, I 'd be a boy-baby. Yas, I know I *could* use 'em, but I *won't*.

It 's true I made Bible book-marks, but they was for a man to preach by, an' a housewifey woman set beside me, sewin' whilst I made 'em. That was enough to difference me. Why, ef I was to get so sedated down thet I could set up here an' do feminyne work, I 'd feel belittled, an' no man can stand that.

Well, good-by, ef you must. Here, ol' friend, gimme yo' hand an' lemme hold it still thess a minute. So much of our earthly hand-shakin' is thess touch an' go — an' I like to realize a friend's hand once-t in a while.

An' now I 've got it, I want to keep it whilst I say somethin'. Settin' here these long hours sence this blessed Christmas day, which, after all my jocular analyzin', has moved me to tears, I 've had a *thought* — a thought which has give me comfort, an' I 'm goin' to pass it on to you.

Settin' amongst my misfit presents, yesterday, mad one minute an' chokin' with

laughter an' throat-lumps the next, I suddenly seemed to hear a line o' the old hymn, "My Christmas will last all the year," an' then I was thankful thet my 'Piscopal experience had furnished me a ready answer to that: "Good Lord, deliver us!"

An' then, with my funny-bone fairly trimblin' an' my risible eye on the fly-catcher, the sweetest thought come to me—like a white bird out of a wind-storm.

Harassed as I was with all these presents, I could n't seem to contemplate a continuous Christmas of peace, noways, when suddenly I seemed to see the words befo' me, differently spelled. Instd of "e-n-t-s" I saw "e-n-c-e," an' right befo' my speritual vision I saw, same ez sky-writin', "The Christmas Presence"—thess so.

Maybe it won't strike you, but it was a great thought to me, doctor, an' "Christmas all the year" had a new sound to my ears.

Think of that, doctor — of livin' along in the azurine blue, beholdin' the face of the Little One of the manger by the near light of the Bethlehem star!

Or maybe seein' the Beloved leanin' on a piller of clouds, illuminin' our listenin' faces with the gleam of his countenance whilst he 'd maybe repeat the Sermon on the Mount from the book of his eternal memory. Think of what an author's readin' that would be — an' what an audience!

An' it 's this Christmas Presence that inspires all our lovin' thoughts here below, whether we discern it or not.

An' what we 'll get on the other side 'll be *realization* — a clair vision with all the mists of doubt dissolved.

This is the thought thet come to me yesterday, doctor, out o' the cyclone of playful good will thet got me so rattled. An' it 's come to stay.

An' with it, how sweet it will be to set an' wait, with a smile to welcome the endurin' Christmas thet 'll last "all the year " an' forever.

II

WEALTH AND RICHES



IT does me good, doctor, to have you thess drop in this a-way, an' nobody sick. Shows you really like us.

Yas, I think the addition is goin' to improve the place a heap. I like a house thet grows to its needs. Apt to be a snugger fit than them thet 's built big to be growed up to. Each addition stands for some event, an' the whole house is a reg'lar history-book.

No, we ain't buildin' no new parlor. 'T ain't needed. That one holds the six chairs an' the rocker an' arm-chair an' the center-table, an' when sociables or anything meets out here, why, they can slide open the doors and fetch in camp chairs.

Yas, we 're puttin' slidin' doors in; thess for convenience, though, not for grandeur. It 'll open up the house consider'ble, an' often make one fire do in place o' two.

Yas, Mary Elizabeth she planned it mainly. She did mean to lower the mantel a foot or two. It 's toler'ble high. But I 've got so used to lookin' up to the row o' daguerreotypes, it would n't seem quite proper to bring 'em down even with my eyes.

The new room over the dinin'-room, with the glass bulged-out winder, why, that 's for Sonny's study, away f'om the noise o' the child'en, an' it 's to be het with a good log fire; an' the long room they 're puttin' on behind, why, it 'll open up into the very limbs of the oaks, nearly, an' that 's to be give over to the little ones, for rainy days an' — whenever they want to stay there.

What 's that you say? Oh, shoo, doctor. Well, I reckon they do say Sonny 's gittin' rich, thess because he 's buyin' mo' land an' addin' a' ell to his house. But I 'd nachelly hate to have him regarded ez rich. He ain't got no ambition that a-way. He makes a good income offn his books, an' keeps strong runnin' the farm. That suppo'ts the family comf'table, an' I suppose he 'll be a wealthy man if he lives — an' I hope he will.

How 's that, doctor? You " don't see

no difference ’’? No difference ’twixt wealth an’ riches? Well, maybe they ain’t — in the dictionaries. An’ maybe they ’re the same out of it, for all I know; but to my mind they seem two distinc’ things.

To me wealth seems to stand for prosperity, — like it might be distributed, — but riches they always seem to be confined to a few. When I think o’ wealth, I seem to see pastures an’ flocks an’ herds, an’ maybe to hear the buzz of machinery — gin-houses an’ factories; but riches, well, riches might be money stowed away.

A home of wealth ought to be broad an’ piazzered round, with big rooms, an’ wide front doors with easy-movin’ hinges to open to the stranger.

But a rich man’s residence — why, I don’t no more ’n say the word befo’ I seem to see cupalos an’ towers rise up, an’ proud cornishes, an’ stiff doors with patent locks an’ bolts.

To bring it down to few words, wealth always seemed to me to be abundance in use, an’ riches superabundance stacked on shelves.

Wealth lies in comforts, an’ riches is ap’

to be cold money. Yas, I 'd like my folks to be wealthy, ef they could without wrongin' anybody, but I 'd be humiliated ef they was ever to allow theirselves to git rich.

I can't say that I think the bare accumulatin' of too much money is a Christian thing, anyhow. I 'm inclined to agree with Scripture on that p'int.

Of co'se we all know thet no camel could n't git th'ough the eye of no needle thet was n't made a-purpose, even ef he humped hissself worse 'n he 's humped a'ready; an' they 's mighty few big fortunes in money thet ain't in a manner gathered up into humps on their owners' backs, so thet they 're too broad for the gate o' the kingdom.

Yas, when a man's money starts to run to cupalos, why, I begin to be anxious about him. 'T ain't thet I 've got any objection to the cupalo. It 's the manners an' behavior thet goes with 'em. It don't take 'em long to git cupalo-minded.

I 've seen some mighty good people try it, an' the tower would n't be topped hardly befo' they 'd begin to be overbearin' an' want to be classed ez " leadin' citizens "

an' all sech ez that. You know that sort o' racket ain't got no Christian sperit to it — not a bit.

An' yet, even whilst I 'm a-sayin' this, doctor, my conscience pricks me, for I realize thet while I ain't no cupalo-man myself, I 've taken pride in the two or three thet 's here an' there in the county. Always want to make shore any stranger 'll see 'em. Yas, that could, ez you say, be called State pride, maybe, but I know 't ain't worthy. I suppose a man has to die befo' he gits shet of all folly.

No; my idee of a "leadin' citizen" is the man thet leads off in wise counsel an' public benefits; a man thet 'll care more to have the children o' the poor learned to read the Holy Scriptures in plain American than to have his own son taught to talk Philippine or Latin; a man thet 'll put his cupalo-money into sidewalks in the back streets his folks don't need to travel in, an' thet 'll lead off in singin' in church 'long with the congregation, instid o' settin' up in his pew, dumb ez a clam, with his ears cocked for choir criticism.

Sir? Oh, don't beg the question, doctor. Of co'se, ef he ain't got no voice, he can't

sing, but he can hold one side of his wife's hymn-book an' keep the place. A voiceless man is fo'ced to sing by proxy to that extent, an' I think he 'd be registered ez a singer in heaven, ef he done it worshipful.

No; to my mind, a great part o' the so-called "leadin' citizens" I 've known most about have n't been leaders at all. They 've been overriders, an' when a good-natured man overrides a community with a passably generous hand, why, it 's hard to turn him down. Takes courage.

Oh, I ain't mentionin' no names, but you an' me 've been livin' in the State of Arkansas sence long befo' the newcomers started to take on new pronunciations an' gingerbread work, an' I reckon we know who 've been some of its leadin' citizens.

We 'd be thinkin' of the same man in a minute ef I was to ask ef you remembered the old man down at Clay Bottom thet planted out shade-trees along the lanes where the niggers had to go to work on the highroads — done it befo' he foun' time to set out any in his own yard. 'Lowed his home folks had time to set down an' fan, an' the roads was b'ilin' hot on man an' beast.

Of co'se I knowed you 'd know. Yas, that was him. He did git to be a man o' wealth befo' he died, but he never piled up idle money — not a cent of it.

What? Oh, now, doc, you can't tell me you don't see where the difference is. But I suppose a man can't understand physic an' — why, of co'se, I know he was called rich, an' I suppose maybe in a sense he was. He left a big estate, alive an' workin', every inch of it. He did n't leave no sodden bank-accounts for his sons to draw on, though.

They 're the damnation o' half o' the sons of rich men, them interest-bearin' bank-accounts is, to be drawed on in idleness. Sir? Oh, I did n't say it was idle money. The banks is busy enough. It 's the trifflin' inheritors thet frets me. Sturdy good man, leadin' citizen ef they ever was one, though I doubt ef he ever owned a coat trimmed off to a waistcoat in front.

Yas, I was sorry, too, about Sally Ann puttin' up that cupalo to her house, but I was n't surprised. Exceptin' for that third little boy o' hers, little Teddy, havin' hip trouble, I 'm afeard she 'd have to be otherwise *disciplined*, Sally Ann would.

Of co'se a woman with mo' discretion would 'a' waited a little while after her second husband's death befo' she started the cupalo; but the remark thet 's goin' round thet she 's "sendin' up an announcement thet she 's open to proposals for number three," why, it 's thess simply malicious, that 's what it is.

No; Sally Ann thess started that tower ez quick ez she found out how much money was left her, that 's all. She never give a thought to how it would look.

I take notice she 's been walkin' the streets for a year past with one o' them high spring-out collars on her neck; an' so, ez I say, I 'm not surprised. A cupalo is thess about the next step. A' out-springin' collar like that sets off a slim woman — gives her a sort o' grandeur; but it 's a style thet can't be trifled with. Sally Ann don't look nothin' but highy-tighty an' overloaded in hers.

A thing like that would be a turrible stand-off to a timid, pore person come to ask a favor. Yas, I mean the high-spreadin' sort the queens wear in the pictures — like that 'n' in Sonny's study. You 've seen Sally Ann wear it. Why,

that makes half o' her conspicuosity. It would take a heap o' courage to pass up a 'umble petition over a collar like that.

Of co'se for queens they 're all right enough. A petition has to go th'ough sev'al hands an' be disinfected befo' it reaches them, anyway, an' the collar thess about expresses it.

Yas, she 's give that top cupalo-room to po' little Teddy, so 's he can amuse hisself lookin' out the winders an' p'intin' out things with his crutch. I don't say but what she *was* took aback when he asked for it. She had laid out to furnish it for a spare room for conspicuous visitors, same ez the Hyfflers does with theirs.

It 's good Sally Ann ain't a man. She 'd set out to be a leadin' citizen first thing she done, an' she ain't noways fitted for it. Yas, no doubt she does think she 's about the leadin' woman in Simpkinsville to-day, but that 's harmless enough. Nobody else don't think so.

My idee of a leader, doctor, it 's one the best people 'll all love to foller — not the one they 're continually obligated to look

up to with thanks. A man like that is shore to turn driver some day, an' he's liable to do it sudden.

Sir? Sonny? Well, hardly. Not yet, anyway. He's got the right sperit for leadership, but he's too young yet, an' he's too occupied with his books. No; Sonny'll always be ap' to think out things to be done, the way he does now, but he'll be likely to git other folks interested enough to go on with 'em. Well, that's so. That is leadin', in a way.

Yas, you're right there. A number o' our "leadin' men" has left public works named after 'em. The man thet founds a charity an' names it after a member of his own family, well, his heart's divided, that's all. An' ef he names it after hisself, why, it's undivided. An' the more magnificent the edifice is, the more he's complimentin' hisself.

Oh, no, I ain't puttin' in no objection — cert'n'y not. We're glad to have chapels an' town clocks built an' named after anybody thet ain't a disgrace.

But they's one thing that I hate to see, Doc, an' that's the way human creatures is everlastin'ly buildin' memorials o' their

sorrers. I don't see why we should celebrate only when we 're scourged.

I 've often thought thet God might enjoy the novelty of havin' a steeple rise up into the sky in joy an' thanksgivin', instid o' which most of 'em is sent up with a wail. Ef houses for orphans is needed, — an' it 's a livin' disgrace thet they are, — but ef they are, why not build one when God sends a little child into a home instid o' when he sees fit to take it away?

The lady thet give the "author's readin'" here, she was tellin' us about a little mountain settlement where the young engaged couples paid for the stained-glass winders, ez love come along, to celebrate their happiness — little bright-colored panes to stand for joy an' to fetch the color of it into the worship. Now, that struck me ez purty. I wish 't they was more thankfulness brought into our religion, an' less mournin'. Not thet I 'd take out one sweet memorial of the dead.

Of co'se, ez we git along further in speritual growth, an' come to realize the unimportance of death an' the importance of life, a number o' these thing 'll pass away of theirselves.

Monuments commemoratin' personal sorrers is ap' to be selfish things, to my mind. When they stand for principle, why, that 's different. Sometimes I think the world shows mo' selfishness in sorrer than it does in anything else, anyhow.

Yas, that 's so. Sonny an' Mary Elizabeth always makes thank-offerin's when the little ones arrive, but I did n't know it was known.

You see, babies costs consider'ble, an' to some it might seem the hardest time to give anything; an' ef they spoke of it, it might look like ez ef they meant to reprove others for not doin' likewise.

Givin' in the right sperit, though, with thought an' prudence, never seemed to make anybody any poorer. Them thet gives that a-way is ap' to spend keerful, an' many a one thet thinks he can't afford it lets his money leak out in driblets. Sech folks ez that rarely saves anything.

Sir? Do I believe in savin'? Why, what makes you ask me sech a thing ez that, doctor? Ef I did n't, I 'd be a turrible sinner, for I 've always done it.

Before Sonny arrived, he was always due, — for seventeen year, — we put by a

little, each year *thess in case*; an' quick ez he hove in sight, why, this whole gang o' grandchild'en seemed to loom up in the distance.

You see, when a man has a child, he takes all the risk they is on grandchild'en. So I bought mo' land ez I was able to work it. I think it 's a man's duty to his feller-men to fix things so thet neither he nor any o' his helpless child'en won't be left on their hands.

But that 's a mighty different thing from ho'a'din' money for money's sake. That, an' the pride of possession which comes with it, is one o' the special pizens thet we 've got to try to keep from our child'en, far ez we can.

Talk about pride of possession, I reckon a certain amount of it is inborn; or, ef it ain't, it 's learned mighty young. Even the little child'en show it. I know one day this spring I was settin' out here on this po'ch, an' happened to overhear the little folks jabberin' out there under the oak. Half a dozen o' the neighbors' child'en was there with 'em. Well, they was talkin' along, one way an' another, when Sally Ann's third girl, last marriage, — little

Annabel, — she ups an' says, says she, " We-all 's goin' to have somethin' at our house thet you-all ain't got! "

Well, they was silence in a minute, an' she kep' on, " We goin' to have a *cupalo* at our house " (tell the truth, that was the first I 'd heerd of it). Of co'se nobody knowed what she meant, more 'n thet " *cupalo* " had a fureign sound. But that was enough for Margie Porter.

Do you know, doctor, these peaked-faced lame child'en always seem to me to be quick-thoughted. Pore little crooked Margie was settin' in the swing, her face all eyes. Quick ez Annabel come out with that word " *cupalo*," why, she chirps up: " That ain't anything! *I've* had the *spilar melingitis*! " An' she give herself a little hitch of superiority ez she cut her eyes around to see the effect.

It seemed for a minute thet Margie was ahead, but purty soon I heerd Mary Blanks's little Jamesie's voice. Them youngsters is so thin their voices is ez dry an' ha'sh ez a katydid's; an' sence I know their mother deprives 'em of butter in Lent, I imagine their th'oats needs 'ilin'. But to go back to this here rivalry.

When I heerd Jamesie pipe up, I chuckled, an' says I to myself, "What on earth is he got to crow over?"

"Well," says he, "we 're goin' to have a *sheriff's sale* over to our farm!" That was a purty heavy piece of artillery, an' they all felt it; but the silence it made was soon broke by who but our little Marthy! Pore little thing! I know she had been sufferin' from the first challenge, an' I half wondered, though I did n't think about it, how she was goin' to make out. Well, doc, an' how do you think she done? You could guess for a month an' I doubt ef you 'd hit what she bragged on — an' it 's right in yo' line, too. When she come out with it, I all but give myself away gigglin' here behind the vines.

Says she, "*We 've got the moest child'en.*" What do you think o' that, now? Yas; an' not satisfied with that, she started a-tackin' on to it. Says she, "We 've got three boys an' two girls, an' " — an' with that she took a long breath an' she out with it: "An' mama sewin' on little teenchy sleeves, an' I would n't be surpriged ef she 's goin' to get some more purty soon!" Marthy always says "surpriged" for

surprised, an' we let it alone. Sounds cunnin'.

Well, they kep' on back an' fo'th, an' I 'lowed thet every one there had had his fling, when I see pore Madge, the Sutton child that Mary Elizabeth an' Sonny 's took to raise. She was layin' down, twistin' a wreath out o' some clovers she had brought in from the fields, but I see her fingers moved purty slow, an' I was wushin' I could put some words in her mouth to brag on — I never like to see an orphan browbeat. But I need n't 've werried. What does she do when she see her chance but set up an' yell out like ez ef she had the best brag o' the lot, "*I 'm 'dopted!*" An' I don't know but ef I was to git the popular vote now, I 'd find thet they all felt she was ahead.

I believe all the child'en at home consider thet she 's somethin' special because she 's adopted. An' it 's a good thing; makes 'em treat her respectful.

What 's that you say, doc? Oh, yas; I don't doubt a-many a one says it 's ridiculous for them to take another child to raise, but I don't see why.

Big families is gen'ally the ones where



That's the way all the orphans'll be took
care of when — when the millennium
comes, ez you say.

they 's most room. I 've seen many an only child fill up a spacious home so tight thet they never seemed to be even room in it for toleration of other children.

An', besides, a little stranger comin' into a big family, why, it 'll git tied up in numberless little affections; an' then, too, they have the wholesome rough an' tumble of holdin' their own. Oh, it 's great! An' I think it 's ez good for the other child'en ez it is for the adopted. That 's the way all the orphans 'll be took care of when — when the millennium comes, ez you say.

Of co'se the childless, why, they 're the special ones the Lord seemed to send into the world to nurture the fatherless. But they don't often see it so, an' of co'se many a one ain't got no gifts that a-way. What 's that you say? "Thankless"? Well, I don't know. Not more 'n anything else. Besides, who thet helps for helpin's sake thinks of thanks?

No, that 's a mistake. I 've known some o' the most ungrateful own child'en on earth to break their parents' hearts; an' more 'n one adopted son or daughter have I seen grow up to be a staff an' a stay.

No; that 's the eternal excuse of the

world's shirkers — that an' " bein' afeard o' what inheritance they might have to deal with." I always think when I hear sech ez that: " Well, ef I was you, I 'd ruther take my chances on any perfect-lookin' little child with a clair eye, an' raise him the best I could, than to know he was the flesh an' blood of folks thet was so afeard of makin' a pore investment." An' I think I 'm right.

But I cert'n'y was tickled over Marthy's braggin' on the child'en. Showed they know how they 're valued. You know, I think with child'en it 's often " Held high, act high."

Yas; it is a pity about Mary Blanks's bein' sold out. She means well, but of co'se things lef' to a paid overseer 's ap' to go wrong; an' ever sence she 's been runnin' three clubs, why, this has been in sight.

A woman ain't no smarter 'n a man in that respect. Quick ez a man starts to put in too much time at clubs, why, his business suffers.

I 've got a funny little notion about Sally Ann's cupalo, doctor, ever sence I 've knew thet it 's a-goin' to cost exac'ly the

amount o' Mis' Blanks's mortgage. You 'd think thet bein' ez Mary Blanks is her own aunt, mother's side — thet —

Of co'se I don't say thet because they 're kin thet her cupalo an' her aunt's mortgage needs to be related, *but they might*.

Ez you say, when the millennium comes — but of co'se they won't be no mortgages then, even ef they 're any wid-ders, which God grant they may not be, or cupalos either.

A widder is always a distress-ed object to me, don't keer what circumstances I seem to see her in. Sally Ann with that high collar on her short neck under that crape veil, with all her toggery, is even more pitiful 'n some I've seen thet mourned in silence. I think they 're usually honest enough, but they 're mighty various.

That veil o' Sally Ann's is thess ez honest in every one of its deadly creases ez the collar thet protests against it. It's all in her.

Oh, yes, she cert'n'y did take on in her first grief, in both widderhoods. Tillie Blackstone says she tried her best to lose her mind the first few weeks, but she

was n't able. Tillie is a turrible game-maker. She 's so able to do without any husband thet she ain't ez considerate ez she might be of the different dispositioned.

Ez to heavenly cupalos, or millennial ones, ef they is any, they won't be no novelty. Every man thet 's been denied one here can have it ef he wants it then; an' he 'll build it to suit hisself, not to spy on his neighbors. Yas; Sally did brag thet she could see the inside of seven kitchens from the scaffoldin' of hers.

She? Oh, she 's up there every day makin' some new discovery. Climbs like a cat. Grew up in tree-tops mainly. Yas, she 'lows thet when she gits a spy-glass she 'll be able to see who 's comin' an' goin' in every church door in town.

No doubt she 'll be able to set in her tower an' watch her aunt's sheriff's sale, ef she 's a mind to; but she won't. She 'll be on the ground. She 's already tried to bespeak uninterrupted bids on some o' the best chiny, an' them cut-glass goblets John bought at the Chicago Fair. She may buy 'em, but she won't git 'em for nothin'.

Yas; we 've got it arranged about the

biddin' at the sale. The only person thet ain't to be overreached is pore Mary Blanks herself. She intends to bid in sech things ez she'll need for a hotel, — tin wash-sets an' thick dishes — for use in argument — an' a few sech suitable things.

But what am I tellin' you for? Did n't I see yore handwrite on the subscription list? Can't fool me ef you did sign "Incog." That 's too much like the language of prescriptions to be much of a disguise for a doctor, anyway. Yas; an' I 'm glad you could see yore way to put down so much.

No; Sally Ann would n't sign. She said she 'd stand by her Aunt Mame in private, an' I reckon likely she will — in little things like the cut glass an' casters.

Yas; she 's offered to keep the pair o' pea-fowls, too — to keep 'em for their feed an' increase. Mary Blanks she won't sell 'em thess on account o' pore John buyin' 'em. Sally Ann is so took up with the idee o' seein' peacocks strut around that culpalo she 's buildin' thet she 'd pay 'most anything for 'em ef it was necessary. As to the increase, I doubt ef they 'll do more for her 'n they 've done for Mary.

I never admired anything ez vainglorious ez a peacock, myself. I could set for hours, though, an' hold one o' their tail-feathers in my hand, thess a-lookin' it in the eye with delight. They 're cert'n'y wonderful. But, of co'se, my mind would be on God, an' not on the feather. A single piece of perfection like that would be answer enough for me to all the infidels in the world, ef they was n't answered at every turn. But, somehow, the burnishin' of a bird's wing is sech a gratuitous exhibition of lovin' thought an' divine power thet I take p'tic'lar pleasure in it.

The red of a robin's breast has claired a troubled sky for me more 'n once-t, doctor. I ricollect one day, years ago, when Sonny was a little mite, an' he was sick, an' we couldn't indooce him to take no medicine, an' you was called away, an' I come out here in desperation, an' thess ez I stepped out I happened to hear a chirp right above my head, an' I looked up into that tree an' I see a father robin, his breast a-shinin' in the sun like copper afire. It was like a mericle, it was so lustrious.

Well, after the first surprise, seemed like the only thing I saw was God, an' I thess

lifted my eyes clair upward, an', doctor, ef God the Father did n't smile at me from the blue spot there between them branches, an' let me know thet I had no occasion to worry, why, I 'm not here to-day. I looked thess a minute, an' then I turned back into the house, an' my heart was at peace.

No; I did n't tell wife about the robin, — she might 'a' thought that fantastic, — but I told her I 'd been comforted, an' thet God's everlastin' arms was right under us all, an' that we was actin' more scandalous in our Father's house than that pore little sick baby was in his, resistin' us in fear an' ignorance.

An' then I patted her shoulder, an' her face claired off, an' she remembered a kind o' spiced preserves thet Sonny liked, an' she went an' secreted the medicine in it, an' fetched it in to the boy; an' when you dropped in that night you said she might take off her clo'es an' git some sleep. She had n't undressed for four nights.

Now, ef I had n't saw God's love th'ough the robin an' fetched the joy of it in to her, she 'd never 'a' thought o' them spiced preserves on earth.

No; cert'n'y I did n't mention the robin

to you, an' you a busy doctor. Of co'se not. Besides, I was n't ez free-spoken about sech things them days ez I am in my old age. I 've often thought sence then, doctor, thet nearly all our worries come from mistrust, or forgitfulness, ef we only knowed it.

Did you ever take notice to the little child'en at a house of bereavement, when the father or mother is took away, an' maybe the props knocked from everything, how they thess walk around with company manners an' unconcern? They may be mystified, but they ain't never uneasy.

They 're always a lesson to me. No matter what the calamity is, the little ones seem to know they 're in their father's house, an' they don't never question.

The grown folks thet have been instructed in faith an' ought to know better, why, they 're scared all but to death. You see, the child'en they 've got the right of it. They 're always took care of, an' so are we. Now, don't it seem to you thet, no matter what comes, we ought to feel thet the earth is our Father's house, an' thet we won't be forgot in it?

What 's that you say? Yas, that 's true.

My mother-in-law she did show that child-like faith when her troubles come — an' thess ca'mly packed up an' come to live with us, which was right enough, though it was disconcertin' for a while.

For ten years she abode with us in peace and harmony; but she had to be disciplined a little before I got things fixed. Not that they was anything I could put my finger on, exactly; but I know I soon found I was losin' my relish for her, an' I knowed that would n't never do, an' so I straightened things out. She was ez pure gold in character ez she was deef an' aggrervatin' in little things.

These over-industrious women is ap' to be too rigorous. She? Why, she 's left more patchwork, an' linen she 's wove, an' sampler-work, than any two women I ever saw.

Yas; Mary Elizabeth 's got four samplers made by four grandmothers an' aunts o' the child'en — three already bestowed, an' I don't doubt the fourth 'll be claimed in time. I like 'em to have sech ez that. It 's stren'thenin' to character. Oh, yas, they 'll have a little handed-down jewelry, too. I don't mind that. I like it.

Why, I 've bought the little girls a finger-ring apiece, with purty blue an' red sets in 'em, to put on when they 're dressed up — not too big an' expensive-lookin'; thess modest little stones to shine th'ough their little mittens, ladylike an' sweet. I never like to see a woman's jewelry out-flash her eyes.

Yas, I want our little girls to care enough for dress an' fixin's to be properly set off when they 're grown up. 'Most anything carried to an extreme becomes pernicious. You know Sally Ann claims that jewelry in a bureau drawer is goin' to waste, an' that 's why she wears them green emeralds with her crape.

Even what I said about hoa'din' money can't be took too literal. Of co'se we all need to keep a little money piled up somewheres to draw on in an emergency — a little more 'n we 're likely to need, too. Every child on the place here 's got his little savin's-bank, but I gen'ally see to it thet the money stands for some p'tic'lar thing, not thess for possession of money.

One he 's savin' for the mules he 'll need to work his piece o' land by an' by, an'

another for somethin' else. The second boy he don't never carry hisn very far. He buys books mostly, an' electricity fix-in's. Yas; he put up that door-bell, an' it rings, too — rings ef it 's teched.

Do I like it? Oh, yas; I s'pose I like it, but I don't, really. I like the different knocks I've known for years, thess a knuckle or a walkin'-cane or umbrella, or maybe a latch rattle, the way you always done. It 's almost ez bad ez livin' in a city to haf to open yore front door an' not know who 's there.

Ef I 'm inside when it rings, I clair my th'oat befo' I know it — then I 'm mad because I 've been flustered.

What 's that? Why, no, I never bother about what they spend their money for. Sometimes they waste it on trifles, but that 's better 'n their bein' bossed in everything.

Little Marthy, now, she 's savin' for a "secret"; an' likely enough it 's for some finery got up for old men, an' I 'll have to wear it on my head or neck, somehow. I always suspicion their secrets.

Yas, I reckon the second boy 'll go to college. All his tastes run that a-way.

Sonny 's able to send him, too, ef he 'll be satisfied to go an' live with prudence.

In my opinion, no boy ought to be able to live in college without prudence. It 's ruination. No; I suppose ef he goes to college he won't want no land, an' it won't cost any more to educate him 'n what it will to give the others a start. I never used to like the way a college education seemed to give a man a distaste for the plow. Seemed like they went away an' learned to know better.

But Sonny says that ain't so. An' he claims thet the man thet writes a song for men to plow by does more for the cultivation o' the soil than ef he was triplets plowin' with discontent. An' I can see how it 's true, although the writin' of songs seems like a child's play for an able-bodied man.

Of co'se when a man goes away to college, why, he gits a chance to see things from a distance; an' ef he can look over the plowman's head an' discern blessin's hid from the face turned to the ground, an' weave 'em into a song thet 'll make the singer lift up his eyes an' listen once-t in a while, why, I say God bless him, let him

do nothin' but make up songs for the toilers, an' I believe the Lord o' the harvest 'll give him credit for days' work, too.

Yas; Sonny has writ a hoeman's song, an' Jim Peters he 's set it to music, an' they say some o' the young men whistles it an' dresses by it in the mornin' when they git up to go in the fields. It 's got consid'ble love hints runnin' along half hid th'ough it, an' a swing to it for all the world like a lively hoe motion. I declare, in some o' the verses you can acchilly seem to see the corn growin' an' smell the ground.

Last Saturday week the black fellers come up an' serenaded us, an' they sung it all, — four parts with a hoe-fling chorus, — an' I tell you it ain't ca'culated to make young folks live indoors — not whilst they 're young, anyway.

Yas, they 's life an' happiness a-plenty in cheerful labor in the open fields, an' a mighty slim chance for the doctor. Why, they 's even wealth in it ef it 's lived right; not riches, maybe, but wealth.

You need n't laugh, doctor; I meant what I said — an' I stick to it.

Why, the way I read Scripture, it seems

to me we 're given to understand thet heaven is a home of wealth. " Many mansions " sounds that a-way, I 'm shore; an' golden streets shows that they won't anything be considered too good for use.

An' sometimes I 've thought thet maybe it meant to give us to understand thet simple riches — like gold — was to be trod underfoot.

An' all the Revelational jewels, why, they seem to be set either in the walls or doors or somewhere, not let loose in piles, to be swapped or squabbled over. No riches to hoard, but thess wealth to enjoy.

III

THE WOMEN



WELL, doc, I don't wonder you wonder. That is, ef it 's thess broke in on you—the stir among the women, an' what it 's come to. I ain't quite so thunder-struck, because I 've had time on my hands an' patience, an' I 've been lookin' on an' watchin' whilst you 've been tendin' the sick.

For perfeSSIONal lady speakers to come to Simpkinsville, an' for our women to go about wearin' badges an' to have their expenses paid aroun' the country ez delegates, ain't nothin' mo' 'n they 've been havin' all over the continent for years. It 's only come home to us, that 's all.

It was funny, when you think of it, though, for 'em to let me into the “mothers' meetin'.” I was determined to see

what they was *to* it ef I could, so I engineered some — offered to take charge, an' light up the hall for 'em, free-gratis-for-nothin'; an' that carried it.

Of co'se they nachelly hesitated, — an' me a man, — but you know Sally Ann is great for savin' a dime, an' she laughed, an' says she, “ Why, Grampa Jones he 's man-woman-and-child, all in one, anyhow.” Of co'se that made a laugh, an' they give in. So I thess handed ol' nigger Joe Towns a dollar, — that 's his gen'al fee for openin' up an' lightin', an' I wouldn't have him deprived, — an' I see the whole thing from the openin' to the close. Yas, it cost some, but it was cheap — considerin' the show.

I tell you, it 's an edjercation to a man to git into sech a crowd, an' to hear the women hol' fo'th. An' I heerd some things I hope to remember, an' to live by mo' or less, f'om this time on.

Of co'se I went on account o' the child'en mainly. I ain't denyin' all curiosity, mind you; but I knowed their mother she could n't leave them at bedtime, — most mothers can't, — an' I allowed thet ef they was good words bein' distributed for

mothers, I could collect 'em an' fetch 'em home about ez well ez the next one.

Sir? "*How many?*"

Well, I suppose they was maybe forty or fifty women there, all counted.

You ricollec' ten year ago come Christmas, when Abe Bosworth's sist'-in-law come down here f'om Ultima Thool an' lectured on women exhorters in the churches, they was n't but *eleven* present, an' *they* was nearer the *froth* than they was to the *sediment* of Simpkinsville folks. The best ones wanted to go, but they did n't dast; opposition run too high.

Well, she said some good things thet 's been quoted variously ever sence, an', ez Miss Phœbe Kellogg says, them 'leven women was the leaven thet leavened the whole lot. Miss Phœbe will have her joke on words, an' sometimes a little thing like that 'll fix a number in yo' mind when it could n't never be done in prose.

Yas, ten year ago only 'leven o' the light-weights floated into a woman's meetin', even when it had consider'ble Baptist sanction, an' now the best of our women rides up the middle of our roads astride of a wheel, an' most of 'em tagged

at that, 'n' we don't think ez much of it ez we did of that argument for women to speak an' pray in meetin'.

Yas, I counted forty-three befo' some started to change seats an' I lost count, but I could come within one of countin' 'em now, *from memory*. I know everybody thet was there, an', ez I told you over the fence this mornin', they was mostly all maiden ladies.

Of co'se they was n't nothin' to hender them attendin'; an', like ez not, most of 'em went to repo't to some home mother same ez I did — an' easier, not havin' no prohibition. You would n't chuckle that away ef you 'd been there, doctor. It was a fine audience o' people, an' a lot o' good speakers.

Yas, the chief o-rater she was a single lady, f'om somewhere down East, I should jedge. I s'picioned her singularity soon ez I see her walk in, an' I 'lowed she was the paid one, too, which she was.

How 'd I tell? Well, I don't claim thet I did tell exac'ly. She was that tall, slim one thet put up at the hotel — the one with short hair an' a certainty in her walk. I



“ The Chief O-rater.”

don't know ez that 's much description, but it 's the way she struck me.

You know they 's short hair from fevers an' short hair from principle. You 'd suppose they 'd look about the same, but they don't. I know which is which in a minute. Now, they was somethin' in the cut of this one's head thet seemed to announce thet she 'd burnt the bridges behind her — even in the front view.

But I 'm sech a Miss Nancy thet ef I knowed a woman did n't have no knot o' hair on the back of her head, I 'd miss it, even in a full-face picture. Thank God, none of our women ain't took to the scissors, so far, though they do say sev'al of 'em went home from the meetin' an' th'owed away their gum-tragic bottles. I doubt ef they th'owed 'em so far into the shrubbery, though, thet they can't find 'em befo' the nex' sociable. I hope not. I allus like to see young girls tricked out a little keerful. It speaks well for the young men of a place — shows they 're popular.

Well, ez I was sayin', this short-haired one she come in with that slab-sided one with the big plaid basque on. Somehow it 's been my lot in life, doctor, to see

women o' her figger wear hit-an'-miss plaids. She was tagged consider'ble, an' she had a woolen bird on her bonnet.

They say she spoke fine down at Cedar Cliffs on the destruction of birds, an' she gives lessons in worsted birdmakin'. She 'lows, so they tell me, thet she don't wear that parrot — why no, I ain't shore it 's a parrot, I on'y jedge by its color — she 'lows she don't wear it because she feels the necessity of wearin' a bird on her head, but thess to show the weak breth — sistren, I should say — thet, ef a bird *is* a necessity, it can be had without sin — fifty cents a lesson, worsteds th'owed in.

She says thet even ef the sheep was to be shorn out o' season, they have promise in Scripture of “tempered winds,” a quotation not found in my Bible, so she ricommends wool-work without let or hindrance.

No, she did n't speak las' night. She only come along to survey the lan'scape o'er, an' see ef she could git scholars. She give a few samples of bird-songs an' mate-callin's whilst the mother speaker took a recess, an' I tell you she was n't bad music, neither.

I s'pose 't *is* a sin, the way the men go

out an' slay birds by the thousands, an' remove all the marks of death from 'em, an' offer 'em for sale — glass-eyed an' happy-lookin'. Of co'se 'most any woman would buy a thing like that, an' not give it a second thought, though *I* doubt ef you could find one engaged in the business.

Yas, I know, it 's a cruel sex you an' me belong to, doctor. Even the most conscientious of us 'll feel virtuous in killin' a bird, *thess so it 's e't*, even ef whoever eats it is already surfeited.

They tell me thet at great ban-quets, where they have things strung out in cou'ses, they never pass the birds aroun' tell everybody 's chuck-full. That looks to me sarcastic, but of co'se it may not be true. Ef every one thet had already e't enough could thess blow on the superfluous bird an' sen' it back to life, they 'd be some sense in it.

But talkin' about the mothers' meetin' — where 'd I leave off, doctor? Oh, yas, I was sayin' the speaker was a singular number. Well, an' that ain't all, neither. She was raised in a' orphan asylum, so they tell me, an' she ain't never had no dealin's with mothers, 'ceptin', of co'se,

the visitin' mothers thet come once-t a week an' fill the fatherless youngsters up with candy an' trash enough to keep 'em puny tell next visitin'-day.

Of co'se I can see she might have an advantage in that, in some ways. It 's give her a chance to study the subjec' from the *outside*. That 's the side most critics has — the outside is.

Her chief objection to mothers seemed to be their partiality. Sir? Why, their partiality for their own child'en, of co'se. She had a heap to say about "universal motherhood"; that 's a grand soundin' term, "universal motherhood" is, an', for o-ratin', it was the finest part of her discou'se, although I did n't quite git the hang of it somehow — not clair. Yas, their partiality seemed to be her principal objection to mothers — that an' their bigotry over old maids.

But, takin' it from first to last, I should say she did n't have much use for mothers, noways — that is, not for the common run. Why, she did n't hesitate to say thet ef she was 'sponsible for a population she'd ruther raise it on the incubator plan, ef possible, than to trust it to the gen'al run

o' mothers. But I reckon she was inclined to be sarcastic in that. Sir? Oh, cert'n'y, they was other speakers, but she was the only paid one.

She was fully primed with all sorts o' testimony ag'in' mothers. Why, Doc', she had a whole set o' baby-clo'es, all heavy with ruffles an' lace, an' she exhibited 'em one by one, displayin' their faults, with the treachery of safety-pins an' all sech.

Then she showed fo'th the injurious motion of a cradle — how it was shore to addle a young brain mo' or less. But the damagin' shock of a knee-jostle was her favor-ite cruelty. Why, she claims thet half the child'en have their constitutions jolted out of 'em befo' they cut their eye-teeth — all on their mothers' knees.

Sir? Oh, she proved it — that is, she showed it fo'th — *with a doll*. She had one o' these with internal machinery an' vocal powers, an' she coddled it up an' kissed the supposed breath clean out of it, for all the world like you an' I 've seen Sally Ann do hers, joltin' it all the while. An' then she opened it up an' showed us the condition of its internals — every vital either sprung or fractioned.

She 'lows she breaks up a ten-dollar doll every lecture, an' she considers it well broke ef it saves even *one* million-dollar baby. She says babies is dressed like ez ef they was millionaires, an' then treated same 's ef they was three-for-a-quarter. You see they was times when it was necessary for her to git up a laugh.

Of co'se this is on'y a little scrap o' the lecture. She started with a child from the beginnin' — or befo' the beginnin', for that matter, goin' back the requi'ed time for all purposes. She seemed to know all about that. I s'pose likely she 's read up on the subjec'.

An' she said one thing thet surprised me, doctor. She said thet the divinely intended chastisement was a spank. Of co'se this brought down the house for a few minutes. An' she ricommends a felt slipper, to be applied after a half to three quarters of an hour of meditation an' prayer, accordin' to how hot-tempered the mother is. What 's that you say? Oh, yas, she got off that joke, — a little joke goes a long way on the stage, — an' it shook the house for a while. Of co'se it 's true. Any slipper would be *felt* in the circumstances.



The Mothers' Meeting.

A frivolous word that away, in the middle of an argiment, why, it frets me. Somehow I seemed to see the little one strugglin' acrost her knee whilst she stopped to crack a joke at his expense. That was the time I made up my mind, *for shore*, thet she was n't no mother.

Some mothers 'll do 'most anything when their dander 's up an' they momentarily forgit the helplessness o' the little one, but they 'd hardly enjoy a scene like that in cold blood; so I was confirmed in my mind ez to her singularity from that minute.

Like ez not she was intended for a lecturer. I 've allus thought preachin' an' practisin' was two sep'rate trades, an' no one person ought to be helt too strict to both.

I tell you, she said some good things, doctor. For one thing, she 'lowed thet the chastisement a mother administers for a misdemeanor is nine time out o' ten mo' a question o' the woman's temper 'n what it is o' the child's fault; which we all know to be true.

Why, you an' I 've known Sally Ann Brooks to box a child for spillin' syrrup on

its frock, an' when it prevaricated direc' in other things, why, she 'd thess dismiss it with a religious maxim 'way over its head.

Somehow the lady seemed *to me* to be whackin' away at Sally Ann about half her time, an' I 'd find myself leanin' over to see how she took it; but she allus seemed to be all of a giggle, cranin' her neck to watch some other quarter.

You know she 's a turrible gamemaker, Sally Ann is, an' they 's nothin' she enjoys so much ez another person's expense.

Yas, the speaker she said a lot o' good things. They was n't but one blame she put on mothers, though, thet seemed to fit our little Mary 'Lizabeth, an' I fetched it home to her intac'. She flared up a little over it at first, but she took it, all the same, an' I ca'culate it 'll make some difference to her.

It was on the mistake of teachin' child'en too much an' tryin' to raise 'em too exact, on a set pattern. She 's consider'ble inclined that away, Mary 'Lizabeth is, an' all the child'en seem to fall into line excep' little Marthy, the one I call mine. She seldom surrenders without a battle, that is,

I mean where she 's got her own notions, an' she gen'ally seems to know thess where she 's o-headin' for, an' I want to have her let alone ez much ez possible.

Of co'se her mother she 's for makin' a lady of her fo'thwith, an' I keep a-tellin' her it can't be did by no short cut. She 'll git there all the same, but she 's boun' to work out her own route.

She 's one o' these mischievius, imaginative child'en, an' sometimes I call her an' git her to settle down, an' I reason with her a little, an' she never fails to come around all right.

She 's a tur'ble little mimic, for one thing, for a child of eight year. Why, she can take off anything or anybody she 's once-t see, tell you 'd imagine it was befo' yo' eyes.

Ef you don't mind me tellin' you, doctor, that little midgit can take *you* off from the time you hitch up at the front gate, all the way up the gravel, hunchin' her lef' shoul-der up so 's I seem to see yo' medicine-case under yo' arm.

She can do that, an' then come an' set down befo' me an' tell me to poke out my tongue, in a voice I 'm all but boun' to

obey. You see, I 've harkened to them words from you for so long.

She took off Brother Binney, the preacher, the other day, baptizin' a doll, an' when she come out with the words. Dicey seemed to think she might be struck by lightnin' for saterlege. But I was n't noways afeard.

I never did believe thet God eaves-dropped on little child'en at their plays much. He 'd git hisself disliked by me ef he did, an' I knew it.

Sir? Oh, yas, Anna Wallace was there with her baby. No comprehensive child'en was allowed; but hers was so young they did n't take no notice to it. I spoke to her comin' in, an' she said she was 'most afeard it 'd take its death in the damp night air, but she was boun' to come an' take lessons in how to raise it, *ef it lived*.

What 's that, doc? You say she called you in to see it befo' day this mornin'? Well, I 'm not surprised. Croup, eh? Thess ez I thought. It coughed pretty metalic every now an' ag'in all the evenin'. Well, she was bent on attendin' the mothers' meetin' in character, an' she done it.

She allus was skittish, Anna was. Got it honest from her ol' daddy, Obadiah Emmett. He wrote po'try in odd hours, you ricollec', an' lost his farm by sheriff sale. His idee o' gittin' out o' debt was allus some scheme thet requi'ed mo' cash, an' he 'd borry it with glee an' certainty.

It 's thess about nachel to expect thet his daughter might be the sort o' woman thet 'd all but kill a child experimentin' how to raise it. Things like that runs in the blood. Smart woman, though, Anna is. I 'll never forgit her valedictory.

But, ez you say, doctor, I never did expec' to see the day thet 's arrived — when the women would rise up in insurrection the way they 're doin'.

Sir? Well, I don't know why not use that word. They talk about emancipation. Looks like they must 'a' felt in bondage to use a slave-term like that.

Sir? Oh, I 'm for lettin' 'em have their way, doctor. I b'lieve in lettin' everybody have their way — lessen it 's pernicious. Of co'se every woman or every individ-yal man can't have theirs, but I 'd give in to *the bulk of 'em* every time.

I don't mind, thess so no partic'lar

woman don't insurrect ag'in' her partic'lar man. That allus makes trouble. But so long ez it 's general, an' the husbands is standin' off winkin' at each other, why, it only enlivens things up a little.

Of co'se a consider'ble part o' the agitators is insubordinatin' ag'in' imaginary husbands, which make it all the mo' harmless.

What 's that you say, doc? Did I go to the sufferage meetin' down at Cypress Swamp? *Did n't* I, though? You forgit, doctor. Of co'se I went, an' it opened my eyes, both upper an' lower leds. I seemed to see the foundation-stone an' the cupalo o' the whole business that night.

"A Dozen Proofs of Woman's Superiority" — yas, that was the title o' that lecture. That 's what took me twenty mile — the title of it. Not thet I would n't yield the blessed creatures a thousand superiorities, but I was curious to hear what particular dozen they 'd lay claim to — in public. The argiment was purty much like any man lawyer's, far ez I could jedge — mos'ly spent in abusin' the opposite side.

She seemed to prove thess about every-

thing ag'in' us thet could be proved ez she stood there brandishin' a fan.

Tell the truth, I felt too vile to live befo' she had done with the third superiority, an' I 'd 'a' slipped out, only I did n't like to. It might 'a' looked like a confession, an' I like my closet for that.

Befo' I got to where my closet was, though, I seemed to git over my remorse, mainly. It was mo' on account o' my sex in gen'al, anyhow, thet I felt guilty — the way she exposed it.

When I cooled off, though, I see a heap of it was thess smoke. Somehow, when I hear a woman talk that away, I wonder how she disposes of her father. She's *bound* to 've had one, an' the Scriptures they mention him along with the mother ez entitled to honor — in the fifth commandment.

Yas, that 's true; it *does* mention him *first*, but, like ez not, that was on account o' not havin' no woman mixed up in the framin' of it. I can't imagine thet either God or Moses intended any slight to women in that.

Sir? No, I 'm not doubtful, doctor; I 'm only forgetful, that 's all. No, I don't know

ez Mary 'Lizabeth ever werried over sech things. She 's been purty well grounded. She 's quick-witted enough to git into trouble, but she 's too busy. But she 's gen'ally one o' the first to see an advantage. She can see the value of a thing even through a shock, an' that 's sayin' a good deal.

F' instance, her bicycle was the first ever rid down the Simpkinsville road. Ricollec' how it startled ole nigger Proph so thet he fell on his knees an' commenced to prophesy when he seen her? I can't say I liked to see her straddle it at first, but she never s'picioned it. She stays purty close-t at home, an' I saw exercise an' open air in it.

Besides, we 'd see by the papers how women was takin' to the road in New York, an', tell the truth, I knowed the would-ef-you-could set o' women would all respect her still more for leadin' off. Otherwise I might 'a' been tempted to let her see me wince.

We 've all got our weaknesses, an' I don't claim to be free from my share. But I would 'a' hated to see her hooted at.

'Stid o' that, she set the fashion, an' mo' butter-an'-egg money has gone into the



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“ Her bicycle was the first ever rid down the Simpkinsville road.”

bicycle-shops than to the heathen from this county from that time on, I 'm proud to say. Yas, I said proud, doctor. I like the heathen, but I like our own folks, too.

But even ef I 'd been reluctant to see her mount it, the way she rid would 'a' consoled me. Seem like *she* an' *it* was *one* from the time she got her first balance, an' that 's where I draw the line yet. Any woman thet, after due practice, don't seem all of a piece with it ain't got no business on no wheel — that is, not for appearance. Mary 'Lizabeth she skirts an' skims for all the world like a chimbly-swaller, on'y mo' graceful.

No, ez I said, Mary 'Lizabeth don't think promiskyous, but she thinks to the p'int. I know when she heerd all the talk about female sufferage, an' so many was arguin' ag'in' it, claimin' thet all the lowest-down women would likely vote, whilst a heap o' the best would n't, — same ez the men does, — why, she did n't seem to be payin' no p'tic'lar attention, an' d'rec'ly, when they was a minute's silence, what did she do but up an' remark: " Why not thess let the *best* o' the women vote? Then *them* an' *the men together* might vote out the *bad*

men, looks to me like, *an' start even.*" Thess that away she said it, whilst she was passin' the custard-glasses.

Sir? Oh, by good an' bad she thess meant the classes thet *ought* an' *ought n't* to, that 's all — them thet kin read, f' instance, or thet has property, or thet 's been here long enough to have a say-so, or whatever. Seems to me, yet, thet that was a purty straight idee — for Mary 'Lizabeth's size. Oh, yas, she figgered it out herself. An' I think maybe she 's right.

The most fittin' of both sexes ought to rule the roost better'n the good an' bad of either one, seems to me.

Sir? Oh, I don't say you could stop them thet has a'ready voted — maybe not; but they might vote ag'in' any mo' ignoramuses comin' in. I don't know nothin' 't all about it. Don't quiz me, doctor.

All I know is thet I 'll be toted out to the polls, ef necessary, an' I 'll drop in my ballot every time, an' so will Sonny. We 'll speak out an' declare our principles. An' ef it ever was to come to us havin' to vote ez to who was to be qualified to vote, I 'm

afear'd thet the sex o' the applicants would be the last thing I 'd stop to consider.

Ez between Fitty Joe and Mary 'Lizabeth, f' instance, why, I 'd discriminate in favor o' common sense an' goodness every time, ez you ricollec' I said to you the other day.

Did n't it never strike you, doctor, thet in a question like that maybe the women has *some* say, whether they wanted it or not?

Of co'se they could, anyhow, ef they 'd a mind to. An' come to think of it, every woman is *half father* an' every man is *half mother*, more or less, an' thess because one sex declares in favor o' one parent an' the other in favor o' the other —

Truth is, I git mixed thinkin' about it. But my b'lief is thet them duties an' restrictions thet hinges on sex 'll continue to hinge, an' them thet don't 'll give way.

Some says ef women vote they 'll haf to fight, but I can't say ez I see that. 'T ain't every man thet 's built for battle. Some is constructed for poets, an' some, ag'in, ain't courageous an' can't write po'try, neither.

Sir? You say am I a woman's-righter?

God knows what I am, doctor. I like that name, an' I 'd like to be all the kinds of a righter thet it comes in my way to be, an' a wronger of no man.

That name seems to 've stood a long time — to be fixed in the sand. I ricollec' when it first come how we all hated it. I was a young man then, an' ef my wife had 'a' mentioned sech a thing ez goin' ez a delegate anywheres, I 'd 'a' looked for her to grow a beard nex' thing, an' I 'd 'a' kep' 'er hid.

But settin' still in a back seat an' listenin' an' lookin' on all these years, why, let any doubter try it an' see ef it don't change his views — that is, ef he sets still enough, an' listens to both sides.

He may believe the way he b'lieved when he set down, but ef he does, he 'll know the reason why, an' have some respect for his opponents, too.

Yas, I 've lived to see a woman delegate rigged out in a dress made by a man dress-maker; an' he voted, an' she did n't. An' maybe it 's right she should n't. I 'm shore I don't know.

I ain't never been able to see anything appetizin' in the picture o' woman at the

polls. But appetite ain't principle, of co'se.

Do you know what I sometimes think, doctor, when I thess look on an' consider? Why, I think of what the Bible says: "An' a little child shall lead them." Of co'se I know I 'm movin' it out o' place a little, but I can fit it into things an' see how it 's true in all this hubbub. I believe thet little child'en are the great leaders an' binders — or they 're the *binders*, anyhow.

Why, I know a man thet 's so flighty thet the next woman 'll turn his head every time, an' he loses hisself so complete thet not even the motherliness of the mother of his child'en 'll hold 'im. He turns fool every year or two, an' the little home-mother, why, she thess keeps eyes an' ears shet tell he gits the better of it, an' the call o' the child'en brings him back ag'in.

Of co'se he allus keeps the home supplied with marketin' — marketin' an' lies an' — Sir? Oh, this ain't no fairy-tale. I know the man. No, he don't live here. He could n't. I 'd thrash him out myself, although I know likely he can't help his nature. Neither can a snake. That 's why I always think, "Po' thing!" when I kill

one. But I kill it all the same every time.

Sir? Oh, cert'n'y. Shore, you 're right about that. The woman *might* be better shet of him, an' ef she lived here she *would*. But that ain't neither here nor there. This is only an extreme case — selected to p'int my p'int.

Yas, they 's long stretches o' time thet I believe thet it 's the child'en in this world thet 's the great power — not the men or the women, but the child'en.

Why, I know a case of a baby rulin' Wall street in New York for a whole week once-t — fixed the price o' cotton for six days an' set everything on a different basis for the entire season. They was seven new houses built in Simpkinsville that spring, more 'n any season before or sence, an' it all come o' that baby.

What 's that? “ Whose was it? or where? or how old was he? ” Well, never mind about that, but I don't mind tellin' you how old he was. He was n't no age at the time. He was an old man's first, thess like Sonny was to me, an' he had been daily expected for a week, an' threatened not to arrive safe-t; an' for five days that man

set in his back parlor, in call o' the doctors, an' dictated telegrams entirely different to what he would 'a' telegraphed ef he 'd had his mind free, an' these telegrams they excited distrust on one side an' courage on the other, an' first thing you knew the old man's name was in all the papers for savin' his country from ruin.

You see, not knowin' thess how things was, he acted cautious, an' when, on the sixth day, that baby arrived, talk about silver spoons! Why, he had a whole set of gold ones in his mouth, he was that rich.

You see, the crisis in the market, why, it passed whilst the baby hesitated.

Yas, he 's the man. I did n't intend to tell you, but sence you know — You see, he 's nachelly techy about the circumstance hingin' on his timidity — that 'long with his ticklish fatherhood.

Of co'se the papers they all give him credit for jedgment, dubbed him the Napoleon o' the cotton-market an' all sech; an', the fact is, he lost his head complete, an' thess held still, waitin' to hear that baby cry.

An' when it did cry, why, the newsboys was callin' out his name 'long the New York streets, so they say. Of co'se they named him for his daddy. Ol' man claired fo' millions for his firm in six days, so the story runs, an' ef it had n't 'a' been for the youngster, he 'd 'a' smashed the whole concern.

An' yit some says luck is a sinful word. An' maybe it is.

Of co'se I *know* where my faith is. 'T least, I know the top notch where it hangs; but the betweenes, why, they often puzzle me.

Sir? Sonny's faith? Oh, I don't bother about that. Of co'se I reelize he 's half mother, to start with, an' I know he believes in God an' Mary 'Lizabeth; an' betwix' that an' his book-writin', an' follerin' the little ones around, why, he don't have no time to reason out doubts. I never had time, neither, tell I was too old to enjoy 'em.

They do say, when folks spends too much time studyin' over things, they 're ap' to git their religious views hind side fo'most, an' they tell me some has writ whole books to show they ain't got no re-

ligious views whatsoever. Looks to me like that 's a thing a person could declare in a minute an' be done with it. But I know I 'm ignorant of some things.

But talkin' about the women — what 's that? Yas, that 's true. Sonny does claim to be a sufferagette — in principle. He signed with Mary Elizabeth an' she signed first time the paper was passed 'round — not that she advocates every man *or* woman votin' — but she 'lows to draw the line elsewhere.

By the way, it strikes me I hear tumblers a-clinkin', an' I s'picion she 's fixin' you an' me a sinful drink now — 't least, mine 'll be sinful. That drop out o' the bottle she puts into my glass o' raspberry syrrup has swelled from a teaspoon to a tablespoonful in two year, an' you ordered it an' never called my attention to it.

Of co'se I reelize a person has to len'then out his crutch at my age, an' you an' Mary 'Lizabeth has agreed to piece mine out on the sly. But I 'm a sort of e-ter-nal vigilanter, doctor. It 's hard to keep a thing hid from me. You 're a tender-hearted man, an' that 's one reason I like you — that an' yo' style.

Thess look at his starched cuff, slick ez a bishop's. It tickles me to see you sport white linen up an' down this dusty road. Somehow I would n't have confidence in a doctor thet did n't wear a starched cuff. It seems to go in with his di-plomy.

A starched cuff an' Latin diseases, why, they 're about half the battle for a doctor. I obeyed a doctor for two years once-t, when I was a young man, thess because he treated me for *tic-douloureux*; an' one day I happened to be runnin' through the dictionary, an' I tripped on the word, an' found 't was n't a thing but common neuraligy, *an' I quit*.

You know neuraligy it's different to most diseases. You either have it or you don't. It's come an' gone with me all my life. It ain't got no use for a strong, man with a healthy appetite, but it's worse 'n a vampire once-t it gits you down; so I 've kep' shet of it mostly.

What? You ain't goin', doctor? Well, ef you must, thess step over here with me to the end o' the piazzy an' look at the child'en a minute.

Ain't that a purty sight, now? Do you ricollec' when I used to look forrard to

the time when they 'd be swings in the branches o' that ol' oak, all goin' at once-t, thess like you see 'em?

Well, ez I set an' watch 'em ez the days pass so joyously, I reelize mo' an' mo' thet I 'm approachin' the time when I 'll be nothin' but a' ancestor, an' I pray God to make me worthy. I tell you, doc, it 's a great an' awful thing to be inherited.

Why, sometimes, when that nex' to the littlest one th'ows hissself down in a tantrum, I 'm startled; it brings back my own youthful tumults so vivid. An' then, when treckly he gits over it, an' comes with his little wet face for me to kiss, I think about my ol' mother, an' I bless the Lord thet my ancestral responsibilities is so nobly divided. Her descendant would haf to be safe-t-guarded with sweetness, even ef he was skimped in his ol' gran'daddy.

How purty the sun is, doctor, where it frosts the edges o' them knotty oak-limbs that away, an' casts rainbows in the wet moss! It 's a wonderful world, after all, an' I trust, when I pass along, it won't be shet out from my vision.

Thess look at little Marthy, now, an' see how she makes the boy give her her

turn at the swing, an' she half his heft, an' then talk about women gittin' their rights. They 'll git 'em when they 're ready, don't you worry.

I did intend to put up a swing apiece for 'em, an' then says I: "No; that ain't the way o' the world. Let 'em learn fair play th'ough turn about, same ez they 'll haf to later on."

Sir? Oh, they 's only one swing short, not countin' the baby, of co'se. They 's allus ap' to be one receivin' discipline; that is, unless his greatest pleasure is in seein' others swing, an' I ain't found no sech angelic natures among 'em yit. Ef I did, I 'd feel his pulse an' sen' for you, yo' perfession bein' keepin' angels out o' heaven ez long ez possible. Did it ever strike you thet that was a sort o' frustratin' business, doc, for a Christian elder?

But ez I was sayin', talkin' about the women — I was worried, some, lessen in all this tumult they might git mannish, an' I 'd be the last one to like that; but they tell me thet they 's thess ez many *organder-lawns* an' *furbelows* sold in the States where they vote ez they ever was, an' no mo' small-sized pants.

I did hear thet the governor of some State or Territory — or the governess, maybe I should say — was inaugurated in a low-neck frock, but maybe 'tain't so? *Anybody* kin say *anything* ag'in' *anybody*.

My taste for sech an occasion would be a high-neck basque, an' black silk for the material — not thet I 'm struck on the governess idee in p'tic'lar, but thess s'posin'. Ef they was a good lady here runnin' ag'in' a bad man, why, I 'd vote for her, of co'se. Sir? What 's that you say? S'posin' it was six o' one an' half a dozen o' the other? Well, in that case I 'd compliment the fair sex, of co'se. That 's a matter o' raisin'. But — Sir? Ef she was reel wicked?

Oh, shoo, doc, I don't know ez I ever knowed one thet was; but I kin imagine thet she might be skittish or hysterical — they 're the kind I dread.

One o' the best women I ever met gi'e me the fidgets every time I looked at her. She was both wall-eyed an' skittish-mannered, po' thing. I allus s'picioned she tried to make up for her eyes by her behavior, which was a great mistake.

She was the salt o' the earth, an' I knew

it, an' yet, ef she was to come up that walk now, I 'd suddenly ricollec' some errand in the kitchen, an' I would n't be able to help it.

Of co'se I 'd return quick ez I could brace up, but back I 'd go on first sight. Why, doc, you would n't b'lieve it of me, maybe, but they 's been certain hens in the yard thet would gi'e me the creeps, allus actin' so agitated an' superfluous — not comparin', of co'se.

There 's Sally Ann Brooks, now; I hate to say it, but she kin git me about ez nettled ez anybody I *like*. What 's that? Why, cert'n'y I like Sally Ann. Yas, I know she will whup her child'en constant an' dress 'em to kill; but she 's one of our own girls, an' she means well.

You know she wanted to be 'lected delegate to the W. C. T. U., on account o' the stand she took to close the saloons; but our women is got too much sense to send the mother o' two sets o' child'en away f'om home.

Besides, you know how she is. Ez Mis' Blanks says, ef Sally Ann found herself app'inted to set on a platform befo' a' audience o' people, like ez not she 'd be for

appearin' with her white ribbin rosette sash-width, or some other conspicuosity, an' I don't doubt she would. She's the sort thet 'll second a motion she don't hear. Anything to be a-motionin' or a-secondin'.

The committee on delegations is goin' to come out here in the mornin' an' offer it to Mary 'Lizabeth; but of co'se she won't consider it. It's mo' of a compliment to her an' Sonny 'n anything else, I reckon.

I feel like a secret society or a dynamite bomb, knowin' it an' not tellin' 'er, but I promised I would n't. Sir? How did I know it? Well, never mind; I was told, that's all. Somehow folks 'll tell me 'most anything. That's a compliment they pay to my dumbness.

You nee'n't to laugh, doctor! Th' ain't nobody can play around a stake an' never tech it better 'n I can. They're the best secret-keepers thet can do that. Yas, I'm a reg'lar magazine of explosives, an' you ought to know it an' never let a fever run too high in my system.

Yas, they've 'lected Miss Sue Sanderson delegate to the mothers' biennial, an' I think they've done mighty well. She'll enjoy the trip, an' she's free-handed, an'

she 's a good talker, an' I jedge she could build up an imaginary family an' raise 'em befo' an audience o' people ez slick ez the next one.

An' I tell you, doc, these meetin's all help along. Of co'se Sally Ann 'll allus be herself, but I b'lieve thet after las' night's talk even she 'll be herself *with restrictions*, f'om this time forrard. I doubt ef she 'll ever box one o' her child'en ag'in — not in public, nohow.

Mary 'Lizabeth says the reason they picked Miss Sue Sanderson for a delegate is on account o' she bein' a Daughter o' the Revolution, an' she 'll sort o' reflect double credit on Simpkinsville. What 's that you say, doc? Of co'se I know nobody don't b'lieve she 's one; not but what she might be, for all I know. Anyhow, we-all know how she j'ined. When she heerd thet the Sandersons of Sand Hill was descended that away, why, she thess up an' claimed it, too, an' commenced to shorten her frock-waists an' to buy flowered curtain muslins for her dresses.

It 's good she 's ez purty ez she is. It takes consider'ble good looks to carry off that Marthy Washin'ton git-up in broad

daylight. You know I ain't called her nothin' but "Lady Marthy" sence she adopted the costume. It pleases me to see her wear it, because it seems to make her so happy, an' the road is thess one picture purtier with her walkin' down it in garret frocks an' white kerchiefs.

She looks ez innocently proud an' delighted ez the wild roses she breshes with her skirts by the roadside.

To my mind, some women is so much like flowers thet for 'em thess to bloom seems all-sufficient. When a girl like Miss Sue wants to be a delegate to a mothers' convention, why, it 's like a lily havin' medicinal qualities — an' they ain't nothin' ag'in' nature in that; they say some has.

Miss Sue says her only regret is thet the minuet can't be danced solitary. She craves to dance it, but she says they ain't nobody in Simpkinsville qualified to dance it with her.

Oh, yas, she said that to Mary 'Lizabeth's face, an' Mary 'Lizabeth she was turrible tickled over it, because she knows they 's only three quarters o' my great gran'pa buried down in the Fayetteville

cemetery, the rest of him bein' left on a Revolutionary battlefield; an' Sonny has got his swo'd an' crutch, both, an' his commission, too. An' she 's got one on her ma 's side, for that matter.

Sir? Oh, no, she never said nothin'. I did pleg Mary 'Lizabeth a little to send on her papers an' things an' git a badge, but she would n't. She 'lowed thet it was all she could do to keep up with her duties ez a mother, let alone settin' up to be a new kind of a daughter.

But I 've got all the dockiments put by, an' ef any o' these little girls thet 's comin' along should ever care to take advantage of bein' born Daughters of History, why, they 'll find their title clair.

Little Marthy — funny for her name to be Marthy, now, ain't it? I never thought o' her an' Marthy Washin'ton together befo' — but our little Marthy is a born leader, an' it would n't surprise me none ef she 'd be the sort thet 'd some day enjoy puttin' ribbin bows on that ol' crutch an' swo'd, an' crossin' 'em over her mantel shelf.

Ef her mind should run that away, she won't haf to go to no junk-shop to git her

relics, that 's one thing shore. They say a heap of 'em does.

Sir? Oh, no, Miss Sue ain't got no badge. She says the name o' Sanderson is all the badge she needs, an' I reckon it 's thess ez well she feels that away.

No, it 's thess ez I said in the beginnin', doctor; they ain't no 'casion to fret about our women. They ain't banded ag'in' the men no mo' 'n the men has been banded ag'in' them all these years in their Odd Feller an' Freemasonry an' all sech.

Of co'se they 's some things in it all thet strikes a looker-on ez ridic'lous, now an' ag'in. F' instance, it plegs me to see our sweet young girls goin' roun' with what they call " Social Purity badges " on.

The dear child'en ain't no mo' 'n purity badges theirselves, ef they on'y knew it, an' I hate to see 'em labeled. Seem like it might make 'em conscious.

Ol' Miss 'Tildy Ferguson is responsible for that. She was born plain-featured, Miss 'Tildy was, an' she 's had a purty lonesome time all her life, with her eczema an' her deafness, an' when she started to wear the badge, why, I was pleased to see it — an' nobody can't say but what she 's

lived up to it strict. But it 's only human not to know when to stop.

I s'pose they come a time when her own virtuous life ceased to satisfy her cravin' for virtue, an' so she app'inted meetin's an' got the girls all out an' tagged 'em, an' it seems they 've made her president, an' she says it has renewed her youth like the eagle, she 's that happy over it.

I reckon the truth is, everybody's life is bound to be a sermon, of one sort or another, an' the happy ones is them thet are convinced thet they 've found their texts.

Of co'se white ribbins an' reelizations of goodness can't hurt our girls in the long run, an' ef it 's brought happiness into the heart of one lonely ol' woman, that 's somethin'.

No, don't let 's you an' me fret over our women, doctor. The motters on all their banners is thess ez good for our sons ez for our daughters, an' we 'll all do mighty well ef we try to live up to 'em.

IV

THE SONG IN THE TREE-TOPS

ELL, Doctor, sence it 's another boy, I s'pose I 'll have to give in to the name, although, to tell the truth, I 've sort o' caught Sonny's obnoxious to Deuteronomy for a Christian title. As he says, it 's too senselessly biblical.

An' so my grandfatherly advice would be ag'inst it. An' yet, we 've shoved it along so often, an', ez you say, a mother ought to have some say in namin' the child'en she brings into the world, an' nothin' 'll do Mary Elizabeth but to pass the name on intact. Pore little baby! I declare, you could put his whole len'th in that name an' have a letter or two left over. Father he give it to me warm out o' the Bible, on account o' him bein' converted th'ough a passage in it—thess befo' my arrival. I 've always felt thet he

must 'a' been on the eve of conversion anyway. I 've dutifully tried to enjoy the book o' Deuteronomy, all my life; but the farthest I 've got is to respect it as a po'tion of the revealed Word.

I 've often wished my father had foun' grace th'ough one o' the Christian gospels, or, if not, th'ough Job or Jeremiah — or even Proverbs. I had a' uncle, mother's side, thet was christened Proverbs, an' he always signed John P. I 've had a good many legal papers to sign, buyin' an' sellin' land an' mules an' cotton, an' bein' ez Deuteronomy was the only name I had, I did n't feel free to initial or curtail it; an' it ain't never failed to provoke a smile when it 's been read out in court.

The trouble is, in passin' it down to this helpless infant, he 'll likely be called by it, although Mary Elizabeth has a'ready got it reduced down to Duty, which she 'lows 'll be a watchword an' ought to suffice. I never felt the full fo'ce o' the name — an' neither has Sonny. The only way I ever heard it in full blast was in reproof, an' I 'd recognize upbraision in it.

He was a good man, my father was, an' his usual form of address to me was " my

son," thess so, unadorned, an' I don't know but it's helped me all my life. It sort o' challenges a boy to be called " my son " by a good man.

Ef I had n't 'a' been on in years when Sonny come, an' tickled out of all reason, no doubt I 'd 'a' follered in father's lead, an' started in callin' him " my son," although it would n't never 'a' filled the bill, exac'ly. He was too little at first, an' then too mischievious, an' too much of a prize-package for a steady title like that, an' " Sonny," why that thess seemed to hit it off right.

An' what an abidin' an' "growin' joy he has always been to us, Doc'! An' to think of him, ez I see him, an' can't fully realize 'im even yet, ez the prosperous father of a large family — well, I often feel ez full o' praise over it all ez a psalm o' David.

I 've always thought thet ef I had my choice, an' my life could express worship, I 'd choose for it to be *praise*. Prayer is all very well, but half the time when I start to pray, I thess reverse the injine, an' send up a message of thanksgivin' instid; an' I 'm ap' to forgit what I got down on my

marrer-bones to beg for. Not thet I git down that-a-way literal these las' days. But my sperit loves to kneel an' give thanks.

I s'pose they 'll be puttin' a cupalo on the orphanage, or sendin' some boy up to the agricultural college, ez a memorial of thanksgivin' for the gift o' the little Deuteronomy. You know Sonny an' Mary Elizabeth they ain't never failed to make a thank-offerin' for every one ez they 've come.

Sally Ann Carter she says thet she thinks them namin' a sixth child Dorothy thess because Dorothy means a gift o' God was nothin' short of a bluff. She's a game-maker yet, with all her troubles, Sally Ann is.

Do you know what I thought about, Doctor, when I see the new baby thess now? Why, it reminded me of the littlest one of Sonny's collections of birds' eggs an' of a talk or two I 've had with his third boy about it, last few days.

An' of co'se it makes me think of *her*, Sonny's mother, the new baby does — an' of him an' the birth-night. You 've been with us th'ough most of our heartrenderin'

experiences, Doc'. Yas, a birth in the family it always seems to give me a fresh purchase on things, an' what you 'd call a new perspective, I reckon. An' of co'se at my age I look backwards. It depends upon how far a man 's traveled which way he 'll look. He 's ap' to look the longest way — an' that 's in my rear.

Settin' here amongst these child'en, I reflect on everything, from my boyhood, down. I even think over an' over ag'in of *her*, — the first time I ricollect of seein' 'er, — an' then of forever afterwards. You know, sometimes a girl 'll pass under yo' eyes a thousand times thess casual, an' be same ez part o' the landscape, an' maybe, some ord'nary day, without any brass band or anything excitin', you 'll thess suddenly seem to *see* her — an' the jig 's up for you.

Well, that was the way it was with *her*. I had often met her, comin' an' goin', an' even passed the time o' day with 'er; but beyond thinkin' she was neat-figured, I was n't conscious of 'er, no ways. Plenty of our girls is nice an' compact-built.

Well, we had a happy life 'together, mother an' me. Somehow, Doc, I 've taken

to missin' 'er ag'in lately, an' I like it. It 's company to me, missin' 'er is. When the dead are clair forgot, they cease to be company to us.

But talkin' about birds' eggs, you know Sonny's third boy, yo' namesake, — little Doc' we call 'im, — he 's got his pa's collection, along with the gift, an' he 's got consider'ble scientific insight, too, so Sonny says.

They 's been one or two rare nests found on the place lately, — you know Sonny has bought in all the woods thet was left, — an' the little boy has got holt o' one or two entirely new specimens. He robs a nest with the same wire seizure thet Sonny constructed when he was about his age. It lifts the eggs out without the inhuman touch.

Well, he come in with this egg day befo' yesterday, a weeny blue-white thing no bigger 'n a joke. Had it layin' in a' ole bird-nest thet he keeps for the purpose, befo' he classifies an egg an' puts it with the collection.

He had n't put finger on it. He always waits a while an' keeps it sacred, an' looks at it; an' yet he ain't chicken-hearted

about it. He collects 'em, only he does it with respect.

Well, whilst he was showin' me the little thing, I helt the nest in my hand a minute, an' I says, says I, " Son," says I, " d' y' ever consider what 's *in* a little thing like this? "

He 's a mischievious youngster, an' his eye twinkled.

" In it? " says he, ".Yaller an' white, I reckon. D' y' ever think what a cunnin' little fry one would make — with a slice o' guinea-pig bacon? "

He 's a turrible little guy, an' smart ez they make 'em. He knowed I was imbued with some sentimental principles about the egg, an' he 'lowed to gimme a shock. But I never let on; I thess laughed an' says:

" Why, yas, 't would be cunnin', would n't it? Or a little omelet would be still better, ef you had eggs enough; an' the guinea-pig bacon could be cured with smoke from a Dutchman's pipe in the woods, or maybe puffball smoke."

I always try to come out ahead in a bluff — if I can.

Well, at that he up an' hugs me, an' says he:

“That ’s why I like you, Gramper: you ’re good spo’t.” An’ he went off whistlin’; but I see he handled that egg keerful, all the same.

I don’t know what variety it was, exac’ly. It was a shade longer’n our hummin’-bird’s, an’ freckled. I suppose I ’m childish, maybe,—or maybe it ’s second-childish,—but do you know I can’t set an’ think about a little thing like a bird’s egg an’ be reconciled to infidelity. It’ll take my mind about ez far afield ez a sermon—an’ sometimes further.

Well, that was las’ Thursday. I knew I had n’t made no impression on the boy; so day befo’ yesterday he was settin’ all over me ag’inste the arm o’ the rustic settee on the po’ch, with his arm roun’ my neck to keep from slippin’. You know he ain’t but thess six,—an’ not fully that,—an’ he was sort o’ meanderin’ along in idle talk when he says,

“Gramper, tell me a story.”

“What about?” says I.

“About anything but God,” says he;

“I ’m tired o’ Him.”

Now, I know thet they ’s some good people thet ’d take exception to sech talk

ez that from a five-year-old. They seem to think God needs to have His dignity sustained constant; but I ain't that make — come to child'en. I 'd ruther try to win 'em roun' to the right way o' thinkin'. It 's hard to jolt a human bein' into reverence. So I thess laughed, an' I says:

“ Is that so, Son? ” I 've always called all the grand-boys “ son.” It seems to remove the one remove between us. So I says:

“ Is that so? Tired o' God, are you? Well, I don't reckon He minds — ef you don't. He ain' lonesome. They 's so many thet feel different — thess so He don't git tired o' you.”

But that did n't bring 'im roun' worth a cent. He thess went on casual:

“ I ain't turnin' 'Im down altogether,” says he; “ but I don't want to hear about Him now. Tell me a week-day story.”

“ Well,” says I, “ you name the subjec', an' I 'll keep God out of it — if I can. He seems to be in 'most everything befo' you git done with it; but I 'll do my best to keep Him out. An' thess ez I said that, a hummin'-bird happened to flutter past

our faces, makin' for the Bermudy vines on the po'ch, an' I see a nest in the crotch of the honeysuckles thet was mingled with it, within easy reach of climbin'.

"How about that nest?" says I. I see his eyes had follered mine. "Let's see ef they's anything in it." Every child loves a bird-nest, even a' ordinary child.

So he stood up on the back rail o' the settee, clutchin' the shoulder of my coat, an' peeked into the nest. Then he put his little finger on 'is lips an' held up two fingers.

"Yas, I thought ez much," says I. "Two weeny eggs, like little white beans. An' the nest wove out o' plant-down, an' covered with lichens, an' located so thet you might be lookin' right at it an' not see it. Seem like that must 'a' been intentional — matchin' a nest to its surroundin's."

You see, I've learned a heap from Sonny, Doctor, an' I spout it out on occasion.

"You can't git one o' them eggs without robbery," says I, "an' you've got a similar specimen. S'pose you come down



Located so that you might be lookin' right at it an' not
see it.

an' run git one o' them for Gramper — an' let 's see what it looks like."

He was down an' back with the egg in a minute.

" Now," says I, " what 's in a little egg like this — when it 's new-laid? No more yaller-an'-white talk now: Gramper 's tellin' this story. First of all, they 's *life* in it — an' the power to stir an' come fo'th.

" A perfec' little bird, feathers lappin' one over another, the bronzy ones an' the green, — thess the same on each side, — all distributed accordin' the rule of thousands of years on a perfec' little body constructed for flyin', downy breast-feathers, strong quills to brace ag'inst the wind — they 're in it.

" S'pose we study over the contains of an egg, Son, besides feathers an' bones, though they 're wonderful enough. How do you s'pose they reg'late the paints so 's they won't git mixed in a little bean-egg like that? You 'd think the speck o' bronze thet was to tip the shoulder feathers might git mixed with the green for the top-knot, or thet the breast-feathers would slip out o' place an' grow out on

the back, maybe, an' humiliate the little thing.

"But they's other things, besides, in the egg, Son. See ef you can't think of some o' the things." But I see the mysterious look comin' into his face, so I did n't wait; I thess went on:

"How about the trust thet's in an egg — an' love, one bird for another — an' nest-sense — an' tree-knowledge — an' sky-ambition — an' — "

An' with that, he interrupted me.

"I don't see the trust," says he, "in the bird's egg."

"Don't you?" says I. "Why, they's trust all round. Trust in the nest, trust in the mother-bird, trust in the — "

"Oh, I see. Don't explain no mo'," says he. He's impatient, 'cause he thinks fast.

"But the wonder to me is," I went on, "where the love thet comes out o' the egg into the bird — the love an' the sense, an' the mother-trust, an' all — *where they're located* in a little thing like this. They's lots more in it than I can think about. They's songs in it, somewhere — one kind o' song in one egg an' only a chirp in an-

other. An', then, they 's the man-fear — in all. Ef everything was n't in its place, the songs would git mixed up with the man-fear, an' — ”

“ Don't! Gramper, what makes you keep sayin' 'man-fear'? I hate that word.” An' he looked purty serious.

“ Oh, well,” says I, “ of co'se, they 's boy-fear — an' cat-fear. Maybe we ought to call it thess enemy-fear.”

Well, that would n't do at all. It excited 'im even worse.

“ What 're you puttin' us in with the cats an' dogs for? ” says he. “ We ain't enemies. We 're friends.”

“ You an' I may be, Son,” says I; “ but the long race o' mankind has pursued the birds in all ages, so thet now they all come into the world with a palpita-tin' dread o' man. It 's got fixed in the egg.”

“ Ain't that awful! ” says the boy, an' I knew I had awakened his little soul.

“ Yes, Son, it seems so,” says I. “ An' yet, in the same egg with the man-fear is wing-stren'th an' sky-knowledge, an' the cunnin' thet 'll enable a bird to secrete her nest in the enemy's country. But let 'em

once-t git up an' away — let a bird tilt on a tree-top an' *sing* — away up beyon' reach, an' the colors of his feathers 'll shine fearless in the sun."

"An' how do they know — who tells 'em?"

"Well, I don't like to say. You know, I promised to keep *Somebody* out o' this story, an' —"

With that, he bu'st out laughin'.

"Better let Him in, Gramper!" says he, clappin' his hands.

"Maybe it 's thess ez well," says I. "Seem like He is in, whether we mention His name or not."

"Why don't you say it, then, Gramper?"

"I 'lowed thet maybe you 'd like to do that, Son. S'pose you say it."

"I knew you was talkin' about God all the time," says he. "Can't fool me! We could n't keep Him out, could we?" He was that tickled over it!

"No," says I; "not whilst they 's mericles around."

"What is a mericle?" says he, serious ag'in.

"Well," says I, "you 've hit me hard,

Son. That 's a big question; but I reckon we 'll find some sort o' answer to it. Them thet has studied over it most says thet life is the greatest mericle, — life an' love, — an' to that I 'd like to add joy. It ain't only the life o' the bird, an' the love thet made him an' thet sends him flyin' acrost the sky after his little mate, but, to my mind, *the song in the tree-tops* is a mericle. It 's joy — *joy in the face of everything*. It 's mighty hard to look in any direction an' not see life, or love, or joy — an' mostly all three. An' wherever they be — "

“ Lemme say it, Gramper. ‘ God! ’ I like that story, because it was n't about behavior an' obedience — an' washin' yo' face an' hands. Tell me another.”

That 's always the last thing he says after a story — “ Tell me another.”

Well, that was day befo' yesterday, an' yesterday I missed the little new specimen egg out o' the nest, an' I ast 'im what he had done with it, an' what you reckon he said?

Said he, lookin' sort o' mysterious an' short-lived — the way I always feel oneasy to see him look — says he:

“ Oh, I thess changed my mind about it. I put it back.”

“ How come you to do that, Son? ” says I.

“ Oh, I thess kep’ a-thinkin’ about God in there with the three little mericles ready to work out, an’ so I slipped it back. An’ I don’t think she ’d missed it.”

“ Thought about all that feather-paint goin’ to loss, did you? ”

“ No,” says he. Then, shakin’ his little curls: “ ’T was n’t that. An’ it was n’t much for the life an’ the love. I kep’ thinkin’ about the wings an’ the sky — an’ the song in the tree-tops. That ’s why.”

“ An’ what about yo’ specimen, Son? ” says I, scrutinatin’ his little face whilst I put the question.

“ I ’ll take my chances — after God ’s done with it,” says he. “ When He lets the mericles out, maybe they ’ll be a good empty shell — or some nice pieces. Or He might leave me a whole one. He *could*.”

“ An’ ef not? ” says I.

“ Then I ’ll try next year — an’ next year.”

“ You ’d ruther be one specimen short

than to break up a resurrection song, would you? ”

An', with that, what you reckon he said? Said he:

“ I would now,” says he; “ but next year maybe I 'll be bigger — an' crueler. An' I 'll get all the specimens I want. An' I 'll whistle loud, to drownd the tree-top song.”

Sonny thinks thet that was purty high-class talk for a five-year-old; but he can't ricollect his own youth, of co'se.

I often wished I 'd kep' a book — or *she* had — thess to note down Sonny's sayin's whilst he was in little dresses. They say thet even passably good child'en go th'ough a cruel stage; but Sonny never. Of co'se he sometimes rode 'is horse too hard; but that was ignorance. But he never forgot his oats. An' now his sleek live-stock is the talk o' the county.

I like child'en to grow up with the responsibility of dependent life about 'em; an' the more service it requires of 'em, the better.

That 's my chief objection to most o' the new labor-savin' machines: they 're so senseless an' cold.

I like a horse. I like his looks, an' his touch, an' his breath — not to speak of his recognition. What is sweeter to a tired farmer, after a day's work, when he 's fed his horse, an' watered an' curried 'im, an' put 'im up, than to hear 'im whinny?

That 's my principal obnoxion to automobiles. It 's lack of heart, along with insanity, an' a disposition to override. Think of a horse with a "honk!" for a whinny — an' a gasolene breath!

I 've talked to my stock, mo' or less, all my life — not the way ole nigger Proph' confides in his dogs an' mule, maybe, but thess companionable, an' they 've always rewarded me in affection.

Imagine a man o' feelin' pourin' gasolene into a motor-car an' pattin' it on the tank, the way I always done Traveler, an' teasin' it about bein' so greedy.

They ain't nothin' endearin' about a motor car.

It 's the over-rich man's chariot, the automobile is — takes the road an' escapes responsibility, ef it can. Good horses are for the wealthy an' respectable, accordin' to my mind. Not thet a good horse won't sometimes prove a bad influence. An' I 'm

not sayin' 'thet a steady man never rides in automobiles. Sonny has rid in one sev'al times, an' he talks about inventin' a new kind; an' of co'se ef they 're handled an' improved by conscientious people, they may be redeemed.

Still, I can't see any great good comin' to mankind th'ough lightnin' speed. I ain't any too much in favor of electrocution for the guilty, much less for the innocent, on our highways.

What 's that you say, Doc'? Yas, no doubt, I do talk too much; but you 're sech a good listener — what 's that you say? “ Do I like a mule? ”

No, I don't like a mule — not to ride behind. An' a donkey I never could take serious. Can't convince me thet a donkey don't know he 's funny, Doctor. Look into the face of the next one you see, — or hear, — an' you 'll see what I mean. He knows he 's the joker in the pack. But I 'd ruther be him than a mule twice-t his size. He 's unmistakable, whilst a mule 's uncertain — an' precarious.

I don't believe much in mixin' races, nohow — not even the human.

Even in the vegetable kingdom, I can't

say ez I 'm much attracted to too much cross-fertilizin', although the production of freaks is always amusin', an' the museums has to be supplied. But when it comes to confusin' *potatoes* an' *tomatoes*, f' instance, till you secure a doubtful-flavored nondescrip' betwixt the two an' call it a pomato or a topato, like ez ef you had lost a front tooth, why I 'd draw the line. They 's a heap o' difference 'twixt a *hybrid* an' a *high breed*.

Yas, I 'd keep my vegetables an' fruits intac', an' when I craved 'em mixed, I 'd ask for a *tutti frutti* puddin' or a *succotash* sech ez Mary Elizabeth concocts.

The perfectin' of common things an' the removal of obstacles seem like it would result in perfect ease an' unrelieved health, after a while; but I s'picion it 'll only mean a shiftin' of pivots, an' a new class of ailments — an' healers.

Too many stairs in a staircase used to be given ez a cause of heart-disease, an' now they say the alleviators in the cities has th'owed so many o' the abominable muscles out o' commission thet they ain't nothin' to suppo't the useless appendages within, an' now any child knows how to

pronounce appendicitis — an' they 're puttin' it in the American spellers.

It 's a disease of the hour, accordin' to my mind, — trouble between the labor-unions an' the leisure class, — that is, supposin' the medical profession has got the right of it.

They are right — sometimes.

You nee' n't to laugh, Doc'; I 'm talkin' about the generality. Of co'se you 're always right, but I don't know ez I think you are so much of a doctor ez a man o' sense. Yas, you may laugh! All the same, ef it 's ever needful to do any carvin' aroun' me, I 'd trust you to do it, for I 'd be shore you 'd keep clair of my vitals.

Yas, eighty-three this comin' month, an' not disturbed over it. You ricollect I was fifty when Sonny come, an' I used to have anxieties less'n I might not live to see a grandchild. An' look at me — seven, an' no len'thenin' intervals between 'em yet, an' me more composed an' tranquilized in feeble health than ever, an' not a' ache or a pain!

They say I 've made a fairly good grandfather, but I don' know. I 'm talkative, —

that 's one thing, — an' children they like talk.

I 'm glad the seventh is a boy; a lucky number, with a boy at each end, ain't bad. What 's that, Doc'? Do I believe sech ez that? Oh, I believe 'most anything in moderation, but I don't let superstition run away with my reason. F' instance, I believe seven is luckier than six, but not so lucky ez eight, come to havin' child'en sech ez ours.

But yo' namesake, little Doc', Doc', — I don't want to insinuate thet he ain't well, — I could n't stand it, — but you give 'im a lookin' over befo' you go. He surprises me too often with his wise talk — that is, too often for the occasional white look in 'is face. What 's that? Oh, yas, he 's a beauty; but they all are, more or less. He looks like the Apostle John of my imagination, an' he is like 'im with me. You know, he was the "loved apostle," John was — thess a little nearer to the Master's heart than the others.

I ain't never said this much before even to myself, but they 's days when I get a little pain in my heart about the little feller, he 's so game an' so clair-eyed, an' he

don't know the meanin' of fear. The very thought of it in a bird seemed to disturb him, an' he talked in his sleep night befo' last. First he scolded, an' I heerd 'im say "Man-fear," an' then presently he called out ag'in "The song in the tree-tops." I reproached myself for appealin' to him too serious.

I don't like that little blue vein acrost his little nose, so to-day I've spent outdoors with 'im, under the trees, an' I've avoided thoughtful talk, an' we've played hide-an'-seek without me movin' out o' place.

How do we do it? Oh, that 's easy — only makin' pertend. I make up my mind where I 'd hide ef I could, — an' it always has to be a place big enough for a man o' my size, an' in a place where it would be possible to find me, — and I holler "hot" an' "cold," accordin' ez he approaches the spot. I'm allowed to climb up or down, but not to fly, an' they has to be some reason why he could n't see me, if I was where I'm supposed to be hidin'. Yas, it 's imaginative, but it ain't distressin'.

I was hid the longest time this mornin' right there in that red hammock, befo' his

eyes, an' when he found it out, he was tickled over it.

Says he, " Why, Gramper, you hid thess like the birds hide their nests — by matchin' colors! "

Mary Elizabeth she bought me this maroon-colored dressin'-gownd 'cause she allowed it was cheerful. You see, it took purty good imagination in a five-year-old, — well, say a six-year-old, which he is nearly, — to realize the matchin' of colors when I really was n't in the hammock — thess pertendin'. But of co'se I had on the red gownd — a leetle darker than the hammock.

So you look 'im over, Doc', an' maybe you 'll approve of droppin' a few nails to rust in his drinkin'-water, or ef you think a change of air would make 'im less keen an' more ruddy, why, we 'll git 'im away to Baker's Springs — or Eureka. I might take 'im there myself.

He 's slep' in my room, in his little bed, ever sence the night he ceased to be the youngest, when he lacked sev'al weeks of bein' two year old. He was a little man then, although he could n't talk plain — ricollec' him sayin' the first night he slep'

there, " Call me, ef you need anyfing in the night, Gramper! " An' we-all laughed so at it. He had heerd his ma say that so often.

He 's always had middlin' thin wrists for a boy, an' he 's too inquisitive about unknown things. Still, he 's got enough o' the old Adam in his temper to encourage me to think he ain't too good for this world. An' I 'm glad of it. Temper 's a good, honest fault, once-t git it in hand.

They 's always been somethin' birdlike about 'im, though, an' befo' he cut his secon'-year teeth, I used to look for 'im to fly away some days. He had a light flut-terin' motion with his little arms, like ez ef he 'd fly, whilst he was so puny, — a motion thet seemed like a threat, — an' I 've sometimes shut my eyes an' tried to think what I *would do* ef —

You see, Doc', that 's one experience thet we 've been spared. The child'en have all kep' well an' strong, an' things has gone along prosperous; an' sometimes I stand off in admiration of Sonny an' Mary Elizabeth, the way they keep so tender an' sweet in the face of uninterrupted prosperity.

I 'm glad I 've had the chance to confide

in you about the boy, Doc', an' I feel better. Sometimes I sca'cely know how to proceed with 'im. Our imagination games seem innocent enough, an' he dotes on 'em, but even in this I 've been brought purty close-t up to the edge o' things.

Says to me this mornin', says he, — an' I could see by a twinkle in 'is eye thet he was in the imagination country, — says he: “ I was n't in my crib las' night, Gramper, an' I didn't lay down all night. I perched.”

“ Did n't you, Son? ” says I. “ That 's funny, because they was a little feller yo' size thet kissed me good night, an' he slep' right there. Who could it 'a' been, d' you reckon? ”

“ Oh, it was me thet kissed you all right,” says he, “ an' then I laid my out-sides in the crib, thess to fool you, an' I flied up, — an' up — an' up to the bird country, where a whole lot o' birds was perchin' on limbs, noddin'; an' every little while one would open one eye an' say ‘ Peep! ’ an' shut it ag'in. An' when I balanced myself on the limb, they all opened their eyes. They did n't think I could do it, but I did.”

“ Wonder who it could 'a' been thet waked up this mornin' in the crib beside my bed? ” says I. “ He had yo' features exact.”

“ Oh, I was back by that time,” says he. “ The birds started to fly away whilst the stars was shinin', all talkin' at once, — thess bird-talk, Gramper, — an' they made funny noises. I think they must 'a' been rehearsin' for their tree-top songs.” An' then, says he, “ Ef I ever stop bein' a little boy, I hope God 'll let me be a bird, an' I 'll sing in the tree-tops all the days.”

Then, seein' me feel of his wrist, he says, “ What 're you feelin' my pulse for, Gramper? ”

“ So you say the birds rehearses for their songs, same as you Sunday-school child'en? ” says I, 'lowin' to divert 'is mind whilst I felt of 'is pulse on the sly.

“ Not the same,” says he. “ We-all rehearse Christmas an' Easter carols, an' they do the tree-top songs. I wonder do the birds know about Christmas, Gramper? ”

“ I would n't be surprised,” says I, “ they know so many things.”

“ Yas,” says he; “ they know about pic-

nic days, I 'm shore, an' they have theirs same day as ours off o' our crumbs; an' they know night an' mornin', *even befo' they show*, an' they go to their tree-beds whilst they can see, an' they beat the sun up in the mornin's, an' know where to find straws, an' water, an' worms. An' Daddy says they know when it 's goin' to rain, an' they put on rain-coats — an' we know what that means. They waterproof their swaller-tail coats with their mouths, an' turn 'em into mackintoshes! Daddy said that. Ain't Daddy great, Gramper? "

" Yas, Son," says I, bridgin' the three generations, with solid content, " Daddy is great."

" An' they know bird-talk," he went on, " because I hear 'em jabberin', an' the sparrers they argue an' wrestle turrible. An' I b'lieve the mockin'-birds make fun o' some o' the birds they 're mockin'. I would, ef I was doin' it.

" But I ain't shore about them knowin' Christmas," says he, lookin' away; " but I tell you, Gramper, ef birds have nestes in the Christmas-tree groves, they must hear the trees wonderin' which one would be chose for the child'en's tree, all the

trees hopin' to be the one, even when they knew they 'd haf to be sac'rficed, so they must know about the Christ-child," says he. You see, Sonny an' Mary Elizabeth, they 've always read aloud to the child'en consider'ble.

So he kep' on talkin' to 'isself, like, an' lookin' puzzled, same ez a grown person seekin' the truth, an' somehow, try ez I might, I could n't seem to turn 'is mind into frivolity, an' that mysterious look it lingered in 'is face. But d'rec'ly, says he, his eyes lightin', says he: "I tell yer, Gramper, I reckon the birds o' paradise they know — 'cause they are Bible-birds."

"An' so is sparrers," says I, "an' eagles — an' others."

"Yas, but the paradise-birds they 're different," says he. "They must 'a' knew Adam an' Eve an' —"

"Yas," says I, "an' for all we know, they might 'a' been hatched in the Tree of Knowledge," says I, tryin' to be extry smart. An' what do you think that little six-year-old said to that? Says he, lookin' right at me, argumentative as a lawyer, says he:

"That would n't 'a' done 'em no good,

lessen they picked at the fruit. It 's *eatin'* it did the damage," says he. "Ef that would do it, all a boy would haf to do would be to be born in colleges," says he, scrapin' 'is first fingers together at me. Sometimes I think he 's too smart.

Then he started reflectin' ag'in, an' d'rec'ly says he:

"Would n't it be bee-u-tiful, Gramper, ef the paradise-birds all rose up together, an' the rest had to draw straws to see who could go up on Christmas mornin's? They 'd haf to have some mockin'-birds an' canaries to do the singin'; an' they 'd fly up — an' up — an' up — an' up, above the paradise-birds' tree-tops before day, all thess findin' their way by the Bethle'm star, till the birthday sun would shine out an' light up the feathers, an' they 'd all start singin' Christmas carols — thess like a big choir.

"An' maybe they do, for all we know. Daddy says that even one o' these thin-wing mosquito-hawks could tell us beautiful things, ef we had fine enough hearin' to listen; but," says he, drawin' a long breath, "th' ain't no use guessin' — an' I 'm tired. They 's lots o' things I do

know. I know I 'm a boy — an' I know when it 's Christmas — ”

“ An' you know *why*, too,” says I.

“ You bet I do,” says he, an' then he rattled off :

Little children, can you tell,
Do you know the story well,
Every girl an' every boy,
Why the angels sing for joy,
On this Christmas mornin'?

“ I 've knew that — *ever since!* An' I been thinkin' it over, Gramper, an' I 'd a heap ruther stay a boy. I would n't be a bird, lessen I had to stop. Birds are all right, but they 're thess birds — an' birds — an' birds — an' birds — all doin' the same way —

“ *But a boy —* ”

“ That 's thess my opinion, too, Son,” says I. “ I 've been several things myself, an' it 's ez good a thing ez I know. Some says I 'm one yet, an' I hope I am.

“ I often wished I could remember when I was a teenchy baby, like the little new brother, — thess nothin' but a weenchy love-center with a boyish disposition to pucker his mouth to whistle, an' from that

on, more boyish every day, cluckin' to the horses before he can talk. It all goes by stages. Then he gits to be a mannish boy; an' then thess a man, with a boyish heart, an' before you know it, he 's surrounded by his own boys, each one equipped for devilment along with duty, so he 's obliged to begin life a little soldier, conquerin' wrong an' fightin' for the right.

“ So I think you 're wise, Son,” says I. “ Ef I knew I was liable to be wiped out sudden, an' had a last-minute vote ez to what I 'd be next, I 'd say, ‘ Ef it 's the same to you, dear Lord, thess do it over ag'in. Make me a boy ag'in. Th' ain't nothin' like it.’ ”

An', sir, with that, what does that youngster do but yell out, “ Hooray! ” an' fling his best velveteen cap into the top o' this magnolia-tree, an' it rainin' pitchforks — an' he knowin' he 'd want to climb for it ag'inst my jedgment. But it tickled me to have him do it.

He ain't none too good to live, Doctor, thank God!

V

THE CHILD AT THE DOOR



OLD on there, Doctor! Don't shove that button! I'll come around an' let you in. She's asleep, at last, an' I reckon you better not disturb 'er, even you. I been waitin' out here on my side po'ch to intercept you, so 's you would n't ring. Come right out an' set down, an' I'll tell you all about it.

It's little Madge, Doctor; yas, little Madge, the child of adoption, an' you know we're thess a leetle extry ticklish about her, lessen any harm was to come to 'er.

"When?" you say? Why, thess yesterday — come home from school with 'er face too flushed an' talkin' mo'n common — kep' up lively talk all th'ough 'er dinner an' didn't no mo'n pick at 'er victuals, all the time insistin' thet she felt fine. Ricollec' one thing she said was she felt

like ez ef she could fly, an' when I felt of 'er pulse, she made game o' me an' says, " I 'm all right, Gramper! "

Call me Gramper? Why not, I like to know? Bless her little heart! Why, Doc', ef I 've got sech a thing ez a favoryte gran'child, after little Marthy, *her* namesake, an' little Doc' who requi'es it of me, why, it 's little Madge Sutton Jones, dear an' adopted daughter o' the house. Well, I should say!

No, that 's so, she ain't to say exac'ly little, although she 's a child to be designated that-a-way. Some women is, an' it ain't always a question o' size. She 's the tallest o' the brood now, an' ef I don't say she 's ez purty ez any o' 'em, it 's because I 'm reticent.

Don't be impatient, Doctor. I 'm a-comin' to that, now. Ez I keep tellin' you, she come home from school all petered out an' thess a leetle too frivolous; did n't eat no dinner an' asked an' was allowed to set up beyond 'er usual bedtime. I see that Mary Elizabeth had 'er motherly eye on 'er an' she follered 'er up stairs an' it was n't no time befo' she come hurryin' back for Sonny to come an' feel of 'er

pulse, an' first thing we knowed, the child was settin' up in bed, preachin' an' laughin' an' cryin' all at once-t. That was the time Sonny first tried to git you on the telephone — an' we ain't none of us got a wink o' sleep all night.

Sonny says she recited a number o' poems correct an' she 's sung like a nightingale, more songs than you 'd think one bird would be able to turn. She 's got a fine musical talent, an' Sonny said las' night he intended to have it cultivated.

Take it altogether, Doctor, it's been a turrible night — the storm outside so the house trimbled, an' the telephone detached by the elements, an' that little girl carryin' on what Sonny calls a Protean show, whatever that is — takin' one character an' then another the whole night th'ough, an' we-all doin' all the incapable things we knowed how for 'er relief, settin' beside the bed an' smoothin' 'er hand one minute an' complimentin' 'er on 'er elocution the next, an' Sonny testin' the telephone every little while in a vain effort to git you to prescribe. He knowed you could n't cross Chinkapin creek durin' the hurricane.

Well, it was a night of storm, in an' out doors, but thess befo' day, when he had finally got you on the telephone, why, she succumbed to sleep — an' she ain't stirred sence. No, we didn't have no time to foller no directions. When Sonny hung up the receiver, she was sleepin'. They-all advised me to go to bed then, but at my age, it 's easier to rise at four than it is to go to sleep, so I urged Mary Elizabeth to go an' git a nap o' sleep an' Sonny, he 's in the saddle, ridin' over the place ez he does every daybreak. Dicey 's gittin' the coffee ready now, thess outside the bedroom door there an' keepin' an eye, an' I stationed myself out here to meet you.

Little Madge, she 's layin' right inside there, an' ef she was to stir, we 'd all hear her. No doubt it 's thess as you say, Doctor. She 's high-intellectual strung, an' a year out o' school would be the best thing for 'er. But I 'd dread to see you tell 'er; she 's sinfully ambitious, poor little human — an' gits only misdirectin' praise for it, on all sides.

She 's got so robust these last three years, seem like we forgit how puny she

was them first years of scant nourishment which have to be overcome, of co'se.

Adoption is a great an' honorable word in our family, Doctor, an' it has sort o' gilt-edged little Madge a leetle ahead o' the others — an' we want it so. It's hard to have things thess exac'ly right. They're ap' to shoot over or under the mark, so, in various little ways, we strive to give the adopted one the higher place. Better that than the lower one — an' otherwise, she shares every advantage an' obligation, share an' share alike. We let 'em foller their talents, mainly, an' Madge, she's the sociable one, with a tendency to cook. Sonny an' Mary Elizabeth, they were resolute in one thing: they would n't have no deception. That child learned to say "'dopted" befo' she knowed the meanin' o' the word, an' thet she had some sort o' friendly advantage o' the rest in havin' a extry pair o' heavenly parents, same ez ef she had a kind of individual bank account to draw on in case o' need, an' she ain't never hesitated to use it, in argument. An' ef she was hard-pressed, I have known 'er to make a special p'int o' bein' *chose*, whilst the rest o' the child'en had to be

took, hit an' miss, ez they come; I s'picion thet Mary Elizabeth give 'er that weapon of defense.

Mary Elizabeth is unusual. It ain't every motherly woman thet is at the same step-motherly, or adopted-motherly, the way she is. She seems to put 'erself in every child's place, an' to see its highest needs.

They 's two distinctions in most families, two honors, so to speak — the eldest an' the youngest — an' in ours, they 's three, eldest, youngest, *an' 'dopted*, an' I ain't shore but the last is first, ez it should be.

Our eldest has always been looked up to, *an' knowed it*, but we ain't never weighed 'im down with a sense of responsibility. I 've seen oldest child'en all but robbed o' their youth in the constant demand to be “ a livin' example ” to the younger ones.

I notice Sonny an' Mary Elizabeth, they 'll often say to the little ones, “ See how pretty big brother does this or that,” but that 's the only challenge he gets — an' “ big brother ” 'll go through his paces like a merry showman, tickled over it. They 's everything in how a thing 's done.

They 's one thing shore; if they 's any

element of total depravity in our child'en, it ain't never been challenged by opposition, an' I have an idee thet ef total depravity is let alone, *an' forgot*, it 'll be gradually absorbed an' cast out o' the system. Oh, yes, I know I ain't quotin' from the catechisms, exactly — but you an' me, we are sort o' free-thinkers, within the lines, an' that 's why I love to hear you talk!

But goin' back to the 'doption o' child'en, why, Doc', one o' the richest lives I can imagine would be thess to have a big, ample home an' to gradually fill it with adoptions — thess casual, ez the opportunity come along — an' seem like I 'd never be so happy ez when I knew they was a child at the door.

I 'd 'a' liked that to 've been my fate, ef Sonny had n't arrived an' been equal to any dozen to us. But like ez not, ef he had n't come, an' opened our hearts *an' our eyes*, we might never 'a' reelized the blessedness o' child'en in the house. Yas, I 'd 'a' been glad to 've been a wholesale adopter of homeless child'en. I 'd even liked to 've put out a sign, "Needy child'en wanted an' no questions asked." I never could see the sense o' all the cate-

chizin' they carry on over needy child'en. To me it 's superfluous. There 's the child, an' it 's its own answer. Why, I 've known cases for adoption quizzed out o' all countenance. Adopters seem to be so skeert less'n they 'll adopt somethin' unworthy o' their dignity.

You ricollec' poor Steve Silverton, Doc'? Well, when little Madge's father died, it seems somebody went to Steve's wife about her — that was befo' we 'd heard it — an' she was for takin' the child, Mis' Silverton was, but Steve would n't hear to it. He made some mean reference to "Old Slouch Sutton," the child's father, an' he 'lowed she was n't *the right stripe* to annex to the Silvertons. I often wonder ef he thinks about that now, wearin' his own penitentiary stripes for high-class chicanery, after castin' slurs on poor old po-try-spoutin' Eli Sutton, who never did a de-liberate meanness in all his vagarious life an' is sleepin', honorably forgot, in a clean, weedy grave on the hillside.

"What 's that, Doc'? Oh, no. He ain't in the potter's field now. One o' the first things Sonny done after they 'dopted little Madge was to go quietly an' have his re-

mains removed into a pay grave — an' it 's all decently labeled, which ain't no more 'n fair to the child.

Yas, she 's been down there, once-t. You know, Sonny had him interred down in the Ozan where he was born. I took 'er down with one or two o' the child'en, an' she laid a flower there. It give 'er a sense o' dignity to do that. Yas, we wanted 'er to 've been once-t, anyway, thess so she would reelize thet she could go.

I 've often thought thet a graveless adult person must feel sort o' insignificant, an' I believe they do.

Yas, Steve Silverton, he turned little Madge down, I 'm glad to say, an' so did sev'al of our best families, with well-meanin' prudence. Jedge Whittemore was one o' them thet shook his head, "No," an' I ricollec' they say he related a fool story of a man he 'd heard about thet adopted a child of obscurity, an' when she was fo' years old, it seems she slipped away from 'er nurse, an' run an' stood on the street doorstep in 'er little birthday suit, in great glee over 'er escape — like ez ef thet was a hyenous crime or had anything to do with her bein' adopted.

Why, sir, when our Sonny was six, an' reely ought to 've knowed better, did n't he make a similar escape from the nigger, Dicey, one day, in nature's scant apparel, an' he never stopped till he got to the court-house, all the way th'ough Main Street, befo' she caught him.

But we did n't consider it no indication of depravity — an' it never occurred to us to try to git shet of him on that account, or wish we could send 'im back where he come from.

What 's that? Oh, yas, they returned that little fo'-year-old to the asylum, on account of 'er escapage — 'lowed that they did n't dast to take the resk of 'er morals, not knowin' but this "tendency," I believe they called it, might prove the beginnin' o' the end.

Yas, sir, they done that — an' she *four*. No doubt they was on the lookout for indications o' total depravity an' were grateful for havin' it revealed in time.

An' — what you say? Did n't the Whittemores —? Why, yes, they did. After turning Madge down on account o' the story o' the baby on the front steps, they 'dopted his wife's nephew, Archie Atkin-



Every little orphan asylum child is in a sense waitin' outside our gates.

son, of Atkinsonville — 'dopted him gleefully, knowin' all about all the fine strains thet was united in his pedigree — an' thess ez soon ez he was old enough, why Archie, he went out *in all his clo'es*, an' disgraced the whole caboodle! Poor Archie! He was the last of an enfeebled line, a nachel, well-dressed scapegoat, without a garment o' decency to clothe hisself with.

We-all felt mighty sorry for his aunt an' uncle. You see, it was double humiliation. Mis' Whittemore was present at the closin' exercises o' the High School last July, an' I could n't help wonderin', when our little Madge was called up every few minutes to take a prize, ef she remembered. Her whole name was called, every time, Madge Sutton Jones. That 's what she is — an' she stands on it.

Of co'se, only the All-father knows what 'er fate will be. That ain't for us — not with any o' the child'en. One mistake adopters make, in my opinion, is in rushin' forward to results an' rewards. Thess the home-givin' an' the happy recipiency of a contented child might be its own daily reward, it seems to me.

I know, in our Sonny's most troublous

days, we often said to each other, *her* an' me, "Ef he was took from us to-night, we 'd be overpaid for all he 's cost us — in the fullness of joy he 's brought us," yas, an' that when he was thin-necked an' cantankerous with his stomach teeth, an' we was obligated to seize our joy chiefly in watchin' him sleep, an' oftentimes takin' turns at fannin' him, all the August nights th'ough.

But talkin' about family traits an' hereditary dispositions, I want to say right here thet we ain't got a thing to worry about in little Madge's family — an' ef we did, we 'd refuse to worry an' try to crowd it out.

No, her father, Eli Sutton, was n't no common man. He accepted town assistance, I know, an' his child has come to adoption, but they was some stuff in that man, an' whilst I could n't never exactly openly uphold him, he always had considerable secret sympathy from me. I wish now thet I 'd follered my instincts an' extended a hand to him in life.

The trouble is we expect the wrong things o' the wrong people. We ought to 've been more friendly to Eli. When

they found his garret full o' them perpetual-motion devices, an' that pitiful diary with them courageous entries of "almost perfected" — why, well —

I 'd give a good deal ef he was back ag'in, poor, uncomplainin' worker, ef only long enough for us Christian neighbors to apologize to him for our mistrust. We often think of it — an' we try to make up to little Madge all we can, for neglectin' him, although, of co'se, she don't know it.

I don't call that bad blood for a child to inherit. They 's some admixture of the martyr in it — with, of co'se a perponderance o' blame fool in finances, which he could n't help.

Her mother was a woman of intelligence an' sperit, but I 'm ashamed to say she cut out an' left Eli, although she must 've knew about his perpetual motion devices, an' the long night stretches o' work when all them candle ends was burned down. It seems she got tired with it all, an' 'lowed she was goin' down to Galveston to pass the school examination o' the state o' Texas, for a public school position, an' she intended to send for the child ez soon ez she could pro-

vide "a suitable home," an' you know she was drowned in the Galveston storm.

She could 'a' remained at home an' got less money here for teachin' our Simpkinsville primary longer hours, *an' looked after the old man*. Ef a wife won't do that, who will? No, she chafed under the style in which she was obliged to live with Eli, an' so she went off in search of refinement. That was when Eli first took to drinkin', an' I never blamed him. I can imagine what it was to be left in a cheerless house, for a man of inventive mind. Why, Doc', you know yo'self thet it took you an' me an' *her* an' the nigger, Dicey, all three, to wrastle with Sonny th'ough his teethin', an' ef his mother had up and lef' me then, I 'd 'a' took to drink in a minute! They was moments when I 'd 'a' done it, anyhow, ef I 'd 'a' knowed how.

I tell you, Doc', now thet you scientists is describin' hookworms an' makin' allowances for "sleepin' sickness," an' treatin' it with somethin' besides moral persuasion, I reckon we 'll have to change the classification of a good many of our unfortunate brothers who didn't seem to be able to keep up with the procession.

Yas, poor Eli Sutton proved in mo' ways than one thet he was n't no common man. He had originality, an' the courage to express it. A holder of unpopular opinions, he did n't give a cent who listened or who reviled, an' they 's somethin' not altogether despisable about that, although it 's ap' to be tiresome.

Why, they was a time in Eli's youth when he edited an' printed a newspaper, out west — *an' sold it* — 't least, he *offered it for sale*, but it was n't no best seller, ez they say. He told me about it, hissself. He run an entire series in that paper on the subjec' o' who wrote Shakespeare's works. Ricollec', he was for a literary man by the name o' Hogg, or maybe it was Bacon. Sence the child'en have been studyin' high school books an' I hear 'em their lessons, why, I 'm gittin' so highly educated thet first thing you know, I 'll be settin' fo'th theories myself. But somehow, Hogg an' Bacon, they seem to run together in a farmer's mind.

They was a po'try writer by the name o' Hogg. He 's dead, now. I 'm shore about that, because I ricollec' sayin' I 'd 'a' thought he 'd 'a' changed his name, thess

for manners. Then, I see thet, on the contrary, he had affixed a second “ g ” to it, for emphasis — an’ I see he was game, an’ I took a likin’ to ’im, on the spot.

Well, sir, that series run a year, an’ it hurt the circulation o’ the paper — in a farmin’ community like that.

But Sutton did other things. For one thing, he invented a sort o’ cement for the construction o’ houses, thess takin’ the dirt of a person’s back yard an’ combinin’ it with chemicals, an’ he believed in it so thorough thet he built a residential home out of it, an’ they say it looked elegant an’ substantial an’ it reely was wind-an’-fire-proof, an’ he saw his everlastin’ fortune in it, but it seems one o’ them western fall rains set in — a regular six-weeks’ soaker — an’ the house thess nachelly subsided during one night, an’ befo’ mornin’ Eli an’ his family foun’ theirselves well placed for the study of astronomy.

It seems, he had left out some adhesive ingregent, so the stuff would n’t hold out in a storm — somethin’ like the man himself. Beyond the inconvenience o’ the occurrence, it seems he was n’t fazed in the least. He ’lowed he realized the mistake

he 'd made an' he was for rebuildin' the place immediate, but his wife, she refused to occupy it with him, for which I exonerate her, entire. They 's some experiments thet a person don't care to repeat.

Oh, no! We don't tell the child sech ez that. What good would it do? She 's got 'er pa's set o' Shakespeare's plays entire, with no end o' "marginal notes," Sonny calls 'em, an' we encourage 'er nachel pride in it. Sonny says the notes is full o' ciphers, but I never could find no oughts to speak of in it.

What 's that you say, Doc'? Was n't I responsible for Jedge Townsend's adoptin' that boy? Well, s'posin' I was, what of it? Don't you think it was a good day's work? Yas, I knew you 'd think so. I 've often been tempted to tell you, then I 'd put it off.

You 're the only person in the county thet knows what blood 's in that boy, Doctor, ef you do know an' from yo' continual lack of denial, I suspicion you do. An' I see you 're still about it yet — which is straight goods.

An' you 'd like to know how I worked the adoption, would you?

Well, partly by my nachel gift o' eloquence, I reckon. I don't mind tellin' you about it, seein' ez it 's turnin' out so happy.

You see, his wife an' him, they both knowed that I knowed that you 'd brought that child home "from the church door," an' was keepin' still about it. Whether you placed it there before or after takin' it inside an' privately baptizin' it or not, we 'll never know. You whispered the one fact of the findin' to me, in confidence — an' ez you hoped I might do, I kep' a shet mouth on the outside an' let him an' his wife know, also "in strictest confidence." No, we 'll never know thess how you found it, but we do know that Moses's little sister never guarded the ancient law-giver amongst the bulrushes with more responsible care than that you give that little foundlin' befo' Pharaoh's daughter in the person o' Mis' Townsend, enfolded it in her queenly an' motherly arms.

So you 'd like, after all these years, to know how I worked it, would you? I 'll tell you, Doe', although I 'd never 'a' mentioned it to you lessen you 'd asked me. I 'm a silent man — when they 's need for it — an' I 've always been here for you to

question, ef you 'd saw fit. I s'pose you thought thet the more you could say you did n't know on the subjec', the better.

I had sev'al things in my favor, with the Townsends, among other things an acquaintance thet runs back three generations. They believe me to be honest, an' I think likely they suspicion me to be fair-minded an' not consciously cruel. An' then I knowed they needed a baby — an' needed it bad. Human hearts are like eggs. Ef they lay still too long, they git addled, an' a child, why it keeps things movin' — an' fresh.

Yas, we had often discussed adoption, they an' me, an' I knowed they was on a still-hunt for an adoptable baby, but I also knowed their prohibitions on the subject. You see, she 's an aristocrat, an' in some ways, they 're like camels, aristocrats is — that is when their aristocracy strikes outward. It 's ap' to make a hump, so thet it 's hard to git into the kingdom o' Heaven. I knowed the Townsends had both kinds — at least she had, or else I would n't never 've entrusted one o' the Lord's little ones to 'er.

She 's got the internal aristocratic *prin-*

ciple in 'er which would prevent 'er from doin' a cheap or a mean act, an' ef she was a little humped on the outside with the consciousness o' superiority, why, I didn't mind, for I knew she could deliver the goods, an' no temptation would move 'er from integrity.

But of co'se, a woman like that, she's ap' to make a point of things, an' she said she 'd never 'dopt no child of uncertainty. They had plenty o' money, an' so they even preferred to have the child penniless, which was a pardonable kind o' selfishness. They wanted to be everything to the little one.

Well, when you told me about this baby, I put on my thinkin' cap — an' when I laid eyes on the child — you ricollec' me comin' over an' kodakin' the little thing with Sonny's camera? Well, I never showed you that picture. Sez I, ef he can be shet-mouthed, so can I. I got a lovely picture, the little thing thess wakin' out o' sleep, with a smile on its face — an' I walked straight to the Townsends with it — an' left it with 'em to look at — an' kep' out o' their way for three days, so they 'd live with it a while befo' anything was said.

An' on the fo'th day, Mis' Townsend, she wrote an' asked me to come over. They was n't no telephones in Simpkinsville them days.

Well, I went, an' I went charged with success so thet nothin' else would do me. I made up my mind where that baby hailed from, an' I ain't never broached it to this minute — but I ain't never changed my mind, neither.

Well, I can't pretend to repeat a conversation, after so long. I went on the principle o' lettin' them do most o' the talkin', but little by little I called attention to things thet seemed attractive about the baby, not thet they was very much in a three-days'-old, beyond the fact thet it *was* a baby, an' healthy — an' happy. Do they often smile, I wonder, Doc', at three days? I s'pose they do. Sonny started in with all his functions so early, I don't seem able to differentiate.

Well, we talked along. I told 'er the down on his little head was a sort o' yaller, like corn silk, an', of co'se it did n't take long to strike the snag o' legitimacy, an' I ricollec', I remarked thet from the little I'd been able to gether, the baby's own

folks was too proud an' haughty to receive it on the sly, at the back door, when circumstances for which the child was n't in no wise responsible made it impossible for it to enter the front portal. You see, I used all the terms I could command thet I thought might appeal to 'er hump. I called attention to the baby's nose-line which happened to be high an' straight, for a newly-born — an' I ricollec' I told 'er it was attired in linen cambridge ornamented with valentia-lace — an' this set 'er laughin'. I ain't never told that on myself before, an' ef I mis-pernounced any o' that finery, why you are to blame, Doctor. It seems to me yet thet you said the goods was cambridge an' the lace valentia, an' they was somethin' else yo' wife said, about its bein' rolled an' whipped — but that sounded kind o' barbaric, an' I omitted it.

Well, I did n't seem to be makin' much impression, but I kep' on, casual. Told 'em thet ef they did n't want that child, we did, which you know to be true, in a general way. Of co'se, we did n't need the child the way they did. I did n't seem to be makin' no headway for about an hour or

so. The Jedge, he had come in, meantime, an' whilst her an' me was discussin', he stood lookin' at the picture. His back is ez straight ez mine, Doctor, ef his ancestor did sign the declaration. No hump there. He 's one of the Lord's aristocrats, all gentleness an' nobility. Well, after a while, somethin' rose up in me. I think it was the *success* I 'd come for, an' I suddenly turned on my eloquent powers.

“ My friends,” I says, or words to that effect, “ I 've lived a long time, an' for the past few years I 've been addicted to biographical readin'. It's my favoryte branch o' literature,” says I, “ after the Bible, which is largely responsible for my biographical taste, for it 's largely biography. An' I 've noticed,” says I, “ thet the good Lord seems to take notice o' these little fatherless ones an' He bestows gifts upon 'em promiscuous, an' sometimes I wonder ef He don't maybe feel Hisself in some special way a Father to the fatherless, who are so often also desolate and oppressed.”

Well, they sent over an' got the baby. That was my maiden effort at eloquence, an' I won out. Ef I 'd never done another

day's work in my life, I 'd almost be willin' to 've lived to do that one thing — especially sence he 's been readin' medicine with you, an' you tell me what a fine lad he is.

Talk about the sea givin' up its dead! I tell you, Doc', the revelations of the dry land 'll outweigh the sea's dead, when the great day comes.

By the way, Doctor, do you ever hear from Dr. Cuthbertson's daughter, Charlotte, these days, I wonder? The first of Simpkinsville women to take holy orders, an' a noble soul she was, God bless her.

“ Died? ” you say — in a cholera camp? You don't say! Well, well! “ Passed like a saint amongst 'em,” you say, “ an' died at the end of the season? ” You don't tell me! What 's that? You say they 's men amongst the survivors who pray to 'er to this day — say their prayers at night to 'er thess ez ef she was a saint!

It 's a great world we live in, Doctor, an' not so much in need of theatres ez a person might think. Settin' back the way I 've done these last years, an' takin' note o' the ins an' outs o' life, I often feel like ez ef I might be watchin' a great play.

The most beautiful young woman thet ever trod our Simpkinsville lanes was Charlotte Cuthbertson, ez I remember 'er — an' it don't take much stretch of imagination to see 'er clothed ez a saint, walkin' amongst the sufferin' soldiers.

They say saints, to be real saints, has to suffer crucifixion — an' they 's more than one kind o' crosses.

Did it ever occur to you, Doctor, thet poor little Mary, the Bethlehem mother, likely suffered 'er own personal crucifixion in a doubtin' community — besides the mortal pains through which she was endowed with the divine countenance? It was n't no cinch — earnin' that slim ring o' gold around her innocent little head!

Seems to me they 's more 'n one lesson to be learned by them thet study over the story o' thet reverent and obedient little maiden soul. It 's capable o' bein' looked at from every direction — an' ef the picture o' the little girl waitin' outside the stable gate don't make us thess a little less critical o' the child at our door, so 's we 'll be inclined to open it to him, in memory, ef we can't always do it in faith, then maybe we haven't studied it aright.

That 's the way it seems to me. Maybe ef I was mo' highly educated I might see it different, but that 's the way it seems to me.

To my mind, every little orphan asylum child is in a sense waitin' outside our gates — an' the timid knock o' their little fists ought to keep us awake till we invite at least one to come in.

Here comes Mary Elizabeth, Doc'. Yas, daughter, here 's the doctor! You say she 's awake, now? Go right in, Doc', an' I 'll wait out here for you. No doubt the fewer people she sees at once-t, the better.

* * *

Well, I thought you 'd never come back, Doctor! Do you know how long you 've been in that room? A hour an' seven minutes! Quite right, I 'm shore, only I 'm youthfully impatient.

An' you say it 's thess the same thing — over-study, an' a disposition to under-nourish which must be overcome — an' she must be kep' in bed a day or so, with anything she calls for to eat an' abundance of it — an' *no books, positive!* Well, ez Sonny says, *you 're the doctor, Doctor!*

All she needs for the present is watchful care an' — what 's that? “ Amusement? ” Excuse me conterdictin' a professional man, Doctor, but Madge ain't never needed to be amused yet. She 'll amuse the whole crowd, let 'er alone. An' you say you 're thinkin' out a scheme for 'er? Well, I 've got patience. But did you take notice to Mary Elizabeth, Doctor? I often think with gratitude o' what a mother she has proved.

Why, she 's motherly todes me, her father-in-law, an' to Sonny, hisself. I reckon any good wife is sort o' motherly to the husband of 'er choice.

Thess look at that hall hatrack, Doc', an' tell me ef you think I 've got any occasion to kick. No, Mary Elizabeth an' Sonny, they ain't no mo' attracted to “ race suicide ” than you an' I are. Thess look at that collection o' hats — an' they ain't one, or a sunbonnet, there thet don't cover a lively intelligence, joyfully expressed, thank God!

Yes, an' — what 's that you say? “ An' yet I long for an orphan asylum? ” Not much, I don't. Why, Doc', they 's some-thin' in the very name thet gives me the

cold shivers! No, no! Ef half our people felt the way I do, they would n't be no sech desolate, homeless institutions on our American soil ez an orphan asylum.

They might have to be a few distributin' stations to which suddenly destituted child'en could be assigned for temporary care. Why, to my mind, a orphan asylum in a Christian community o' rich an' roomy homes is a sort o' national disgrace.

How can any institutional child have a fair chance o' bein' fully human? Think o' yo' boy, our little Doc', yo' namesake, bein' registered in one o' them awful books ez "No. 171," an' wendin' his lonely little way every night down the aisle between the rows o' cold, white cots to find his number, with no personal knee for his "Now I lay me" — an' havin' every last one o' his cunnin' little characteristics smoothed out flat by the daily iron of institutional rules — made exclusively for the rigid order o' the institution!

I never will forgit the answer o' one o' the little asylum inmates thet come to a Sundayschool class I taught whilst I was a youth. After callin' attention to a number o' Scripture mottoes thet adorned the



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walls, I ast 'er which of all the Bible texts she could remember influenced her the most, an' she chirped up, without a moment's hesitation, "*Keep off the grass!*" Poor little prohibited orphan!

Sech child'en always remind me o' the poor little incubator chickens thet ain't never nestled under a wing. Ef we was raisin' 'em to sell by the pound, it might do!

How 's that, Doc'? You say you 've done evolved a plan for little Madge? Mh, hm! Say that ag'in, Doctor, an' say it slow. Why, that sounds tremenjus! You say, it 's important to git 'er away, but not so important ez to turn 'er mind away from 'erself — an' so you propose to order little Doc' away for his health, an' to send Madge along to look after him, with instructions to live out o' doors — "any good place where they 's hills an' springs," you say?

Well, you 're a man of inventive genius, Doctor! An' I know the identical Methodist family thet 'll be glad o' their board-money. But why limit 'em to two, Doc? Eureky Springs has got the name o' bein' a sort o' fountain o' youth — what 's the

matter with me goin' along, an' exercizin' a grandfatherly eye on 'em! I could n't renew my youth, because I ain't never parted with it, but I might recover my infancy, all right. But I'll promise to stop imbibin' before I need infant's care!

Well, I'll be jiggered! Shake! — "be jiggered?" Yas, I'll be doggoned! An' I ain't swore sech a swear ez that in thirteen year — not sence the little pitchers has had their big ears set for proper speech. But this tickles me, down to the ground! Go right in, now, Doc, an' consult with Mary Elizabeth about it — see how quick she can git us ready to start! An' fix the day.

You say the responsibility o' little Doc' will keep Madge's mind off'n 'erself — an' 'er strenuosity in follerin' him around will keep 'er actively in the open?

An', what 's that? "Fishin'-tackle?"

Jerooshy! Why not! I wonder could I ketch a fish ag'in at my age, ef I was to balance myself keepful on a grassy bluff over a sedgy creek — with a old bakin' powder box with holes punched in the led, full o' wrigglin' bait beside me, an' a fryin' pan an' a piece o' bacon an' some cornmeal

an' coffee in the basket at my elbow, propped ag'in' the cedar knees? An' matches handy!

An' ef I was to ketch a string o' goggle-eyed pyerch, instid o' rejoicin' over the recovery o' my youth, would I be ungrateful, I wonder, an' start a-grievin' for *her* ag'in, with the old regret thet time has begun to heal?

You see, in our youth, that was our favoryte debauch — thess droppin' every corrodin' care an' startin' out equipped for a day in the open, an' many's the time we've come home by star-light, so full o' sweet inflation an' gratitude thet any little bothers thet had been weighin' us down would seem to float away, same ez thistle-down.

What's that you say, Doc'? "Is Madge a cook?" Have n't I been tellin' you all along? She's one o' these ornamental cooks, Madge is. Could n't do a thing thess so, by rote, to save 'er life. It's like the Sutton eloquence, practically applied. Ricollec', I ast 'er to slip out in the kitchen an' bile me an egg, one day, when she was about six, Dicey bein' busy, an' what did she do but dye that egg green? Done it

with peach leaves an' grass, an' a pinch o' sal sody, I believe. A thing like that is enlivenin', in a little youngster o' six.

Why, it was our Madge thet built that bridal couple on Amy Ames's weddin' cake, Doc' — done it every lick out o' her own head, an' whipped up eggs an' sugar!

No doubt, she 'll have little Doc' an' me eatin' woods-cooked corn dodgers of every conceivable shape, an' the fried fish, balanced on their tails, beggin' to be devoured!

Ef you hurry an' git us off, Doc', we 'll be there in time for the dogwood blossoms — an' we 'll stay till the persimmons is sugary. I hate to be impolite on my own p'och, Doctor, but why in the kingdom come don't you *rise up an' go in an' make arrangements with Mary Elizabeth — an' decide when we can start! Seems to me we 're losin' time!*

VI

KEEPING UP WITH THE PROCESSION



AS, Doctor, ez you say, “ Life is a sort o’ procession ” — an’ we either keep up with it, or we don’t. Of co’s’e, they ’s leaders an’ hangers-on, an’ the funny part of it is thet a heap o’ folks is vastly mistaken ez to which they are.

No doubt a few o’ these noisy automobillionaires thet whizz ahead in their lightnin’ cars think they ’re ahead in the race, an’ yet, when the century’s story is told, they may not be many o’ their names remembered, an’ the man thet set in darkness inventin’ their riotous vehicles an’ handlin’ the most murderous of all the elements, why his name may name his time. The real leaders ain’t always in the public eye.

But, ef I ain’t mistaken, I ’ve got a few

dear ones in the ranks, all tryin' to keep step, God bless 'em! An' that gives me joy.

Well, we 've had a great time, Doctor, these three months! They 've revealed more to me than I ever dreamed of. Thess a leetle over three months — a hundred days — an' look at all four of us!

I 've often noticed that time an' distance seem to git sort o' mixed when people go in search of health. One week far away is better than ten aroun' the corner.

Sonny 's sendin' Mary Elizabeth along with us, Doctor, was a great idee. It was the finishin' touch, not only for her delight over things, but it relieved me of all care, an' now, I don't reely know what we would 'a' done without 'er. You see, Sonny had been to New York befo', whilst he was a lad, the season he attended them lectures an' visited Mr. John Burroughs at his farm in York state, which is still the most important event of his life, which give him his final determination to foller in the old poet's footsteps, in all humility.

He always has hoped to take Mary Elizabeth some time, but lessen they had went on their weddin' trip, they ain't never been

no time since when they could 'a' went without takin' a perambulator along — an' that would be awkward, all the way from Simpkinsville to New York.

Of co'se, Mary Elizabeth, like any stay-at-home mother, she shook her head an' declared it would n't never do, an' what would become of this an' that? But Sonny, he had n't been keepin' still all those years for nothin'. He had thess been bidin' his time.

It seems, he had been thinkin' Marthy needed more responsibility in the house, to develop her ability, an' less book-study, an' Mary Elizabeth, she had been on the nest too constant an' needed to shake her feathers a little an' so he figured thet it would be good for hen an' chicks for her to clair out for a while an' they was n't no use wastin' arguments. Of co'se, Mary Elizabeth's heart was divided, but little Doc' bein' so puny, why that balanced any sentiment she might 'a' had about leavin' Sonny.

Of co'se, the trip has n't been no ways what you an' me planned. Renewin' a person's youth with a fishin'-pole along old familiar streams sounds very well in books,

I know, but I 'm glad I was n't brought to face it. It 's like goin' back to an' ol' homestead after many years. They 's thrills in it, no doubt, but they ain't all thrills of merriment, an' I had n't no mo' planned out goin' over our ol' playground than I commenced to have misgivin's.

Even ef all the ol' companions could show up, it would be somethin' of a shock, thess the way they 'd hobble.

Sonny, he knowed better. He always had sense. Says he, "No, go to a new place — an' see a fresh set o' things," an' he had n't no mo 'n spoke befo' I felt he was right.

Why, Doc', I wonder ef I could ever give you any idee of my sensations when for the first time, I *set on the shore of the ocean an' watched a ship sail in!* Thess think of it!

I tell you, ef I 'd been struck blind the whole way, comin' an' goin', that one sight would 'a' paid me for the benighted journeys.

What 's that you say, Doctor? "What did I enjoy the most, of the entire trip?"

Why, thess my same ol' occupation, *thinkin'*; it don't take long to answer that.

Yas, thinkin', an' the *object* which furnished the chiefest delight was the one thing thet had power to stop the wheels for a while, an' that was the sea. Yas, the limitless ocean, at night, in a ca'm.

It seemed to answer all my doubts, so thet I did n't seem to be able to more 'n wonder an' give thanks.

I s'pose this is sort o' fantastic talk, for an ol' farmer like me, but you see, my eyes had been kep' so free of glorious sights in nature, thet when the ocean loomed befo' my vision, I had to rise the full height at one bound — an' if I breathed for five minutes, I don't know it.

What 's that you say? "Mary Elizabeth?" Oh, she was pretty still over everything. She ain't never been a person of many words, you know. But she 'll be able to tell Sonny an' the child'en at home a heap mo' statistical facts about the tides an' the moon than I will — an' I don't begrudge it to her.

I don't want to separate my ocean. An' I hope the time won't never come when the very remembrance of it won't envelope me an' bring comfort to the remnant of my childhood's faith.

Of co'se *Somebody* had to think it all out — an' then make it. An' I 'd be willin' to trust my eternal salvation to the One thet conceived sech a thought, even if He had n't seen His way to turn it loose.

Mary Elizabeth, she was satisfied thet the sea was all right. She approved of it, quick ez she had give it a ca'm look-over — an' then she was ready for the boa'd-walk, an' the people.

An' I don't know but maybe she 's thess ez good a wife for Sonny an' maybe a more contented mother for his child'en than ef she had spent her time at the seashore writin' pomes to the ocean. They say most sech, written on the spot, is only fitten to be washed out with the tide.

But talkin' about Mary Elizabeth, she declares thet this trip has enriched her for life — an' I 'll whisper to you thet a heap of the enrichment she 's brought home in her trunk. An' little Madge, well, Madge has kep' a diary, Sutton-fashion, an' Mary Elizabeth does say thet they 's more 'n one po'try-verse in it.

“ I 'd thess ez lief she would n't do that, tell the truth, but ef she wants to, she 's welcome. Maybe it 's the quickest way to

git it out of her system, an' Sonny says thet when a person has sech a tendency ez that, th' ain't nothin' better 'n to educate 'em thorough, so 's they 'll come ez near ez possible to knowin' where they 're at.

You ricollec', Doc', Sonny tried his hand at po'try, for a while, in the matin' season — an' pore little Mary Elizabeth, who is a better judge of layer-cake than what she is of po'try, has got it all religiously preserved.

It would 'a' humiliated me to have Sonny turn out a mejum poet, like the Hummell's boy, thet let his hair grow that-a-way. But that calamity passed us by, ez I hoped it might.

Ol' Mr. John Burroughs — I don't know why I call him old when he 's sev'al years my junior, exceptin' thet most of my talk about printed matter is quoted from Sonny, an' he reverences the ol' writer's gray hairs. Ez I was sayin', Mr. Burroughs, he says Sonny is a reel poet an' thet all his prose books betray it. Now, that pleases me — to think of a man havin' the wherewithal to resk makin' a blame fool of 'isself an' to keep sober. They 's character in that!

Ef a person is a reel poet, I don't reckon he could keep it in. An' I feel shore Sonny has said the same thing, in his higher language. I ricollec' of him sayin' thet ef a man did n't have a chance to express hisself, sech, f' instance ez cravin' to write an' not knowin' his a, b, c's, the great pomes thet he could n't utter would come out under his hand, ef they had to be built in brick and mortar. Now, that 's beyond my comprehension, an' I 've sometimes wondered what a pome done in concrete would look like. Sonny says it might take shape ez a church, or a bridge, of perfection. He even said thet to plan some of the big cathedrals, a man had to be a poet.

I often wonder ef these writer-folks ain't liable to git a leetle off, Doctor, thinkin' so constant in one direction. It might be like leanin' too long one way with the body. Not thet I 'm uneasy about Sonny, for his life is too various an' too human to git far out o' balance. An' then, nature-books sech ez he writes, why they have almost to be conceived in the open.

My belief is thet they 'd be less crazy people ef they stayed out o' doors more.

Of co'se, these men they call nature-

fakirs, they might easy die of vitiated atmosphere, constructin' their fantastic beasts by the midnight oil. I delight in Sonny's freckles. Any naturalist ought to be tanned good, an' I can't imagine a conscientious jungle-writer sufferin' from insomnious disorders, exceptin' maybe an occasional nightmare, from encounterin' wild beasts.

But talkin' about fakirs, why, the Jersey shore where we 've been, Doctor, it 's fairly alive with 'em.

At one place, we 'd promenade down the boa'd-walk, Mary Elizabeth an' little Doc', an' Madge an' me, an' it would 'a' surprised you to see how I walked too, an' we 'd stop where the East Indians waited with their camels an' whilst I was picturin' to myself the flight from Egyp' first thing I knew I overheard Mary Elizabeth say somethin' about "— the eye of a needle," an' I knew she was expoundin' to the children how impossible it would be for a rich man who trusted in his riches, to enter the kingdom of Heaven— a camel bein' about the last thing you 'd imagine goin' through a needle's eye. Of co'se, to the little ones, this seemed like a confirmation

of scripture. She would n't miss sech a statistic ez a hump, you know, not for nothin'. She 's a great mother o' children.

Well, we 'd stop an' look at the camel an' then we 'd pass on to the East Indian fortune-teller, a tall African-complected man with straight hair with a red turban on 'is head an' a gilt belly-band around 'isself. He stands up right befo' you an' passes pieces o' blank paper around an' requi'es everybody thet wants his fortune told to write his name secretly on the paper an' hand it back. Well, he takes all the sheets without glancin' at 'em an' slips 'em into a brass cylinder which he closes, makin' grimaces all the time, an' then he lifts it up before him, makin' passes over it an' mumblin', an' d'rec'ly he stops an' takes out the papers an' distributes 'em ag'in — an' every last one has the person's fortune writ on it, an' signed by hisself — all did in the dark tube.

Mary Elizabeth, she was so tickled over it thet nothin' would do but she must write Sonny's name on one, an' git his fortune, to take home, which she done. It never occurred to her to tell the fakir thet she was writin' a man's name, an' when his

come out, word for word like little Madge's, why she was disgusted.

Little Doc' an' me, why, we did n't invest in the fortune-tellin'. He was mo' tickled over the canary-bird fortune-tellin', an' he 'd 'a' spent all he had, nearly, thess to see that bird walk out an' pick up a' envelope an' present it to him with his little bill.

Maybe I ought to 've drawed the line ag'inst these impostures, but I 'm not ap' to be severe in my discipline. Sometimes, in triflin' things, it 's thess ez well for a child to find out for 'isself thet a thing is a fake. It might save 'em mo' serious experiences in after life.

You see, we could investigate all this foolishness an' do any little triflin' shop-pin' an' remain in the open air, most o' the booths bein' open to the sea.

But we spent hours every day, down in the sand, in a secluded spot we got access to, an' here little Doc' an' Madge, too, sometimes, would take off shoes an' stock-in's an' wade in the salt wet sand — an', of co'se, they all but me went into the daily baths. I walked in, once't, down in our retirement, clad in full, waist deep — thess

for the experience. Of co'se, I dressed a-purpose when I went out, an' I knowed the sea water would n't hurt me.

It was the only moment in the trip thet I reelized my age. To think thet one little invasion of the deep would satisfy me! But it did.

Yas, the trip cost consider'ble, but it 's well invested. The long still days in the woodsy place an' them memorable weeks at Atlantic City, an' then New York — the Statue of Liberty, Grant's Tomb, Brooklyn Bridge, an' Central Park, an' — well, all of it. I was disapp'inted in some things, but it was my fault. The Museum of Nachel Hist'ry which Sonny charged me to show little Doc', never give me much pleasure. I like my birds alive an' dry bones never appealed to my taste specially. I suppose, the truth is I 'm a student of life and not of death.

But I led little Doc' there one fine day in May, thinkin' he 'd never want to come away, but I reckon he taken after me, for whilst he took on right smart over the birds' eggs, an' spent a whole mornin' readin' the labels of new specimens, he never wanted to go back. I never asked

why. But when he preferred to play in the park an' feed live squir'ls, why, I 'd provide the nuts for 'im — an' that was where I done the greater part of my meditation, whilst Mary Elizabeth an' Madge was shoppin' an' investigatin' elsewhere.

Madge showed fine sense about her pocket-money, buyin' keerfully the presents she wanted to fetch home. She did buy one turrible gay hat, poor little human — one with a red rooster-head on it, an' tail-feathers sproutin' out o' the neck of it. I felt alarmed when I first see it, but the streets o' New York furnished so many worse sights thet I see she was only follerin' the procession, in her own little way. Some of 'em even wore parrots an' screech-owls. No, I 'm not jokin'. It 's God's truth. Yas, an' I 've seen lizards wore on hats, an' beetles, an' the shop-winders full of lovely rag flowers, nachel ez life!

Yas, little Doc'. He gained consider'ble in weight, too. You see, we ain't slep' under no roof for over three months, exceptin' when we 'd first arrive places befo' they 'd git us fixed up out o' doors — an' of co'se, in New York.

Tell the truth, I was most afeard *to* sleep out doors in New York, lessen some aerial terror was to descend upon us from the firmament ef we got high enough to escape the dangers of the street-levels. I s'pose it might be sort o' luxurious to be robbed or etherized by a professional burglar in a flyin' machine thet let 'isself down the chimbly, but I 'd ruther deal with the dangers I 'm accustomed to — sech ez an occasional harmless black-snake gittin' into a person's bed — or wasps buildin' where it 's embarrassin' to encounter their enmity. Or, even keepin' a lookout for niggers in watermelon season.

These homely little warfares is ap' to be naggin', at times, but I wouldn't swap a year of 'em for the experience of a single daily page of the casualties thet 's printed in the New York papers. I wouldn't, reely.

Yas, I like a little town where the people play cards for fun an' marry for keeps — an' of co'se, they must be some thet live along that-a-way, even in New York. You see, the good an' quiet folks, they ain't so conspicuously in sight ez some others.

But they 's days when, ef you do read

the papers, you think of Sodom an' Gomorrha — that is, lessen you look over the edge o' yo' paper. I taken notice thet the sky-lines around the city is punctured with church-steeple, an' the harbor, in summer, why, it 's alive with a perfec' flotilla of floatin' hospitals, filled with the ailin' child'en of the poor, all equipped by rich men. An' you know, they opened the great Museum of Art on the poor man's holiday an' made it a free day — thess so them thet craved to view the pictures an' statues could do so, on the Sabbath day. An' I wish you could see the Sunday crowds! All talkin' foreign tongues, mainly, no doubt praisin' America behind its back. An' you ought to view the fifty-thousand dollars' worth of rhododendrons, thet one rich widder lady presented to the public park, where any God-forsaken beggar may look upon beauty an' benevolence, an' maybe take courage.

Think of a person of wealth keerin' that much for the ol' woods wild growths, thet we've known an' humbly loved all our lives! An' the city allows it! Yas, an' they tell me thet this beauty-distributin' lady belongs to the sect of predestinated

infant damnation, too — but I reckon she don't bother much about that doctrine.

Or, ef she does, maybe she intends for the children o' the poor, so many of which die yearly, shall see the beauties of nature here, befo' they go to hell, poor little things! Anyway, she 's lenient an' gentle-hearted.

An' then there 's the "bread-line." Did n't you never hear about that? Well, it 's another redeemin' charity of the turbulent city. It seems thet a good an' brotherly-minded baker distributes free loaves every night at midnight to any hungry humans thet 'll step into line an' take it — an' the only credentials they have to give is the fact thet it 's worth their while to come an' stand an' wait — an' that ought to be enough, God knows, especially in rainy, cold nights. They 's always some folks to criticize sech ez this, an' they do say thet some o' the men in that bread-line ain't worthy, like ez ef that had anything to do with it!

They 're hungry, an' that 's all they claim. I 'd hate for my daily allowance of bread to be measured by my virtues — with

my appetite for home-made rolls, saturated with sweet butter.

An' that ain't all, Doctor. They 's monuments of benevolence everywhere you turn in New York. There 's Cooper's Union, give an' endowed by a good, plain, industrious man-o'-the-people — a great stone buildin' equipped an' endowed for the education of all sorts of artisans an' artists, free of cost. His stature sets outside the buildin' — a rugged-faced, noble old man — an' with a look of comradeship for the workin' people. If I 'd expected any comfort in cold marble, I 'd 'a' shook that stature's hand.

An' they 's free wards in most o' the big hospitals — an' free scholarships, everywhere, to be earned by diligence. They 's even places where notably no-'count folks can get free night's lodgin', down where the poor is crowded so thick.

I 've always had great sympathy for bad people, myself, knowin' my own short-comin's an' how my parents was to blame for all the good thet 's in me. Somehow, they always seem to git left, the unfortunate wicked do — an' maybe that 's the one reason they stay bad.

Only five days we remained in New York, but it seems like a month, ez I look back. It was full of enlightenment for me, in mo' ways than I like to confess. They 's so much good in the worldly-minded — an' whilst little Doc' an' me would set down in the midst o' that wilderness of flowers in the park on May day, an' I watched the butterflies flittin' in the sun, rivaled by their sisters in spring attire in the automobiles, lace parasols h'isted an' feathers flyin', well, I felt fully resigned to butterflies. It was all so pretty.

The one thing thet plegged me continual in the city was the *hurry*. An' when a man over eighty an' accustomed to go his own gait is constan'ly ordered to "step lively," why, he 's tempted to answer back — 'special when the order comes in the brogue of a foreign aspirant. But I kep' my temper — although I 'm free to confess I didn't hustle none. I knowed enough to reelize thet they was obligated to wait tel I 'd escape from their cars in my own time — an' I took it — with Simpkinsville composure.

Did you notice I fetched that word home, Doctor? *Hustle* tickled my fancy, an' I

adopted it fo'with — an' intend to try it on the mule.

Thess think, I ain't been home twenty-fo' hours yet, an' it seems a week. It don't seem nachel, yet. Everybody thet passes the gate seems to be waitin' for somebody to ketch up — they saunter so slow. But don't think I 'm critical, Doctor. I like it an' I 'm that tickled to be home again. I 'm thess a leetle bit sp'iled by foreign travel, that 's all, but I 'll soon get attuned to it ag'in.

It 's restful to me, thess settin' here an' watchin' that ol' clock tick whole seconds. They 's somethin' respectable in its leisurely pendulum. It don't hump itself for nobody, but thess goes along with its kindly admonition on the flight of time. It seems to invite industry an' preparation, whilst these numerous little fancy clocks thet keep up sech a tick-tackin', they 're like drivers, an' nervous at that, if they ain't delerious. Yes, I 'm grateful to be home again. It 's all so sweet.

The house looks like a bower with all the flowers thet 's been sent in — an' Sonny had a lot o' surprises for us.

Yas, ez I said, for a stiddy diet gimme a

quiet town where the people play games for fun — an' marry for keeps. I never realized they was any " r " in divo'ce, tell I went to New York. Oh, yas, I know how to spell it, now. It was in every day's spellin'-lesson there — an' sometimes in good company, too, I 'm grieved to say. Even when they ain't no blame, it always seems a pity to me. Seems like ef they 'd try harder an' not think so much about it, they might jog along somehow in harness.

Yas, ez you say, Doc', life is a sort o' procession, but I 've come to the conclusion thet the real procession ain't always the visible parade. An' the gait of any part of it ain't no indication of the speed of the whole.

Keepin' up with the procession here in Simpkinsville is quite different from keepin' up with it in New York. Why, they has been folks here, ez you know, thet entered with their 'lectric motor-cars an' cocktails an' flared around a while, whilst some railroad scheme was pendin', or the government was investigatin' for our mineral wealth — an' I 'd resk a guess thet they 'lowed they was leaders durin' their stay, an' I don't deny they did make things

hum, whilst the men zig-zagged over the country an' their women nosed around secretively buyin' up all our old honest-made mahogany furniture, which I'm ashamed to say they done.

That 's why so many o' these big square parlors in Simpkinsville is all radiant in golden oak buffetry an' new plush. Mary Elizabeth, she showed great fo'ce of character an' fo'sight durin' that period. I ricollec' thess ez well her sayin' thet ef all them rich women was buyin' up the delapidated an' rheumatic furniture, thet our people was eager to consign to the attics, *they must be a reason*. An' they did n't git none of ours.

She has got one spare room — the guest chamber, she calls it now — thet is purty showy an' new — but the ol' heirlooms is stationary in our home. Mary Elizabeth never was flighty about things like that.

Still, she likes to keep up with the procession, ez she sees it, in fashion an' manners, an' I 'm glad she does. I called yo' attention the other day to them heathen gownds she wears, *Ki-mo-nos*, she calls 'em, an' she cert'n'y does set 'em off. But a person of my age has got to git used to a

thing like that. It was the longest time befo' I could look at her in 'em without thinkin' of "the heathen in his blindness," an' I half-expected to see her "bow down to wood an' stone." It did look that idolatrous!

Yas, an' Sonny, he 's took to *pajamas* for bed-style, an' Mary Elizabeth has sent all his ol' night-shirts to the missionary-box — a even swap with the heathen, I say. I don' see why they make sech a to-do about the *pajamas*, though. They ain't no mo 'n child'en's ol'-fashioned bed-drawers, cut without feet, an' wore with jackets to match, cord-an'-tasseled, consid'ble. They seem a little too fantastic to me, like ez ef, ef I was to go to bed in 'em, I 'd expect to dream about jockeys or circus-riders. They would n't conduce to reposefulness — not in my case.

No, to my mind, they 's nothin' better to sleep in than a long, unbleached, wife-made night-shirt, of the orthodox faith, without bylaws or amendments.

But I 'm only speakin' for myself, an' I 've got enough thet *she* made me to last the rest of my journey — all with turkey-red J. D.'s cross-stitched inside the collars.

But I ain't prejudyced, come to other folks — an' I take pride in Mary Elizabeth's open mind for a new thought, in anything.

Oh, yas, she 's gradually changed a number o' things in the household. She sets "center-pieces" on the table meal-times, an' she 's raised the grade of meal-announcement, from time to time, ez she was enlightened.

You ricollec' the years we was summonsed to dinner by that ol' bell which I dearly loved an' will resolutely miss, all my days — the bell I had made for Sonny's deaf grandma, an' which was peremp-rory enough to call the cows home. It was good an' hearty — seemed to announce abundance an' to take appetite for granted, although I don't deny it was middlin' loud, for an invitation.

Well, she 's set that aside for emergencies, an', for a time, we hustled in by a silver-plated call-bell which she picked out of a New York catalogue, an' she would touch it mighty graceful with her ring-finger, Mary Elizabeth would, an' she does yet, endurin' of a meal, for relays of hot waffles or fried chicken, but —

Well, we had thess about got used to the call-bell, when that heathen Chineese come th'ough here a year ago thess befo' Christmas, when everybody's bars of prudence is down; an' he carried a bankrup' stock of carved idols an' things. Did I say "bankrup' stock"? That word should 'a' been "bankruptin'," for it thess cleaned me out o' cash. Mary Elizabeth, she showed some excitement, as she spent all she had an' borrowed of me, first time in 'er life. It tickled me to have her do it, too. I like a weakness for purty things—in a principled woman.

Well, sir, she laid in a lot o' stuff, but her chief purchase, after them *ki-mo-nos*, was that set o' Chinese gongs which you an' I have ambled in to dinner by for the last year, although I doubt ef you took notice. You see, I'd always foller the heathenish thing up with a Christian grace quick ez I could. But it was ornamental an' musical. Three gongs suspended, one above the other, by a green cord an' tassel, an' you 'd sound all three simultaneous, by drawing a pethy drumstick down 'em, with one stroke.

The child'en would always scramble to



When that heathen Chinees come th'ough.

see who could git in to ring 'em first. Well, it did seem like that might 'a' remained the top notch of style but she 's got them gongs put out o' sight now in her curio cabinet.

What's that? "A curio-cabinet?" Why, a curio-cabinet, it 's — it 's a sort o' private show-case filled with odds an' ends on which you seem to miss the price-tags. First, she used to put the child'en's Easter eggs in it, an' the family daguerreotypes stood open in a line, but I take notice thet sence the child'en has been comin' home f'om boa'din' school an' visitin' their schoolmates, in Little Rock an' Louisville an' Richmond, why everything has been banished from the cabinet but high-class junk — an' it 's all right.

Well, she 's hung them heathen dinner-gongs in there now, an' she 'll take 'em out, of a hot day, when comp'ny comes, to make conversation.

An' so — what 's that, Doctor? "How do we git our summons to meals, now?" Tell the truth, I 'm most ashamed to tell you, Doc'. I 'm 'feard you 'll laugh. It all comes f'om boa'din'-school. The girls,

they 're always the pioneers in style. They fetch in the reforms.

Well, the latest thing in high life, so it seems, is what they call "noiseless service," an' so we have a word-o'-mouth per-nouncement, did with awful solemnity. Mary Elizabeth, she's got Mirandy, Dicey's youngest, so she can dike out at a moment's notice in full regimentals, a sort o' doll night-cap twisted on her head an' a white apron on, an' she 'll step in sight an', without no curtsey nor nothin', she 'll per-nounce: "Dinner's served!" thess so, no mo', no less, which, bein' interpreted, means that it ain't served but will be, quick ez the percession files in. An' like ez not, when we git there, they won't be a morsel o' victuals in sight.

You may be surprised, Doctor, but do you know, I ruther like the progression, for a lot o' growin' children. They 're takin' flight, now, one by one, for school and college, an' that 's the beginnin' of the breakin' up o' the nest, an' I 'd hate for any one of 'em to show up ez greenies when they finally go fo'th.

Fashions all change with the clock, anyhow, an' many o' the ol'-time customs thet

seemed fixed in common-sense, is thess ez fallacious ez the new ones thet we 're too quick to resent.

In my boyhood days, the tables of hospitality was heaped with all sorts of victuals, so thet a visitor felt surrounded by the fat o' the land. Now, the pendulum is swung the other way, an' even at banquets the table is destitute of nourishment — an' profuse with flowers an' ornaments. An' sech expressions ez "groanin' boards" is clean gone out o' fashion — even with our young lawyers.

An' when you think of it, for food which has to be partaken of in rotation, why, the new way is most sensible. But new fashions don't faze me.

I 'd answer any summons to a good dinner. I 'd even be willin' to attemp' to go in by handsprings, ef they requi'ed it of me. Or I 'd submit to surgery an' have my front coat-tails amputated to match Sonny's last achievement, although I 'd feel like a dejected chimbly-swaller in one o' them swaller-tails.

No, I ain't never pinned my faith to ways an' manners. Of co'se, in all this reconstruction, they 's some things I miss, but,

dear, dear! How much I 've got in exchange!

An' the things lackin' in the new order, they 're so triflin' — sech ez havin' my pie in sight all durin' a meal. Somehow, it helped me to gauge things. I 've told Mary Elizabeth thet her keepin' the pie in seclusion would often cost her a second slice, ez I could n't make allowances for all thick-nesses.

I like to quiz her, thess to witness that set o' dimples she turns out. Ain't it wonderful, Doctor, the way a mother can bequeath a gift to numerous child'en, an' not lose none of it, herself?

Now, them dimples, Mary Elizabeth has bestowed 'em, without diminution, on two o' the girls, an' her gracious way with people on all three — all the time growin' 'erself in womanly grace, an' her own dimples even deepenin' ez the years pass, an' she stoutens a little.

Why, they was n't a highfalutin' woman thet we encountered in our travels thet cast her in the shade for manners an' sweetness, not a one.

Not goin', Doctor? Yas, I know you thess dropped in to welcome us, this first

day, but you mus' come ag'in, when I git all my experiences classified. Then I 'll be able to talk.

It cert'n'y is good to be back. Thess see puss rub 'er ol' back ag'inst my leg an' purr — an' the dogs — Oh, no, I ain't been down to the stable, yet. I 'll take to-morrer for that.

Step here, Doc'. Lemme whisper to you. I ain't opened my head about Sonny's las' book — an' us seein' it bought at the bookstand in New York. I can't speak about it yet. It stops my th'oat. But nex' time you come — Wouldn't it be funny, Doctor, ef, when the whole story is told, our little home-grown Sonny thet divides his time betwixt field an' woods an' home study, tendin' strictly to duty an' lovin' it, — wouldn't it be funny ef he should turn out to be an unconscious leader in life's procession.

Th' ain't nothin' further from his ambition, I know — an' maybe that 's one reason I think about it.

VII

ABSENT TREATMENT AND SECOND SIGHT



GOOD for sore eyes you are, Doctor. I had about give you up for good. I was thess a-thinkin' yesterday thet like ez not you was ketchin' on to the new idee an' givin' me absent treatment!

That 's right! Hang up yo' hat an' drop in that rocker an' give me some account o' yo'self! No absent treatment in mine, Doc'—not from you! They might be some doctors I 'd welcome it from, but I 'm too fond o' yo' conversational powers which help me ez much ez yo' physic.

D'you reelize thet you ain't set foot here sence thess after our return from our travels—seventeen days ago—an' me thess bustin' to confide all our escapages to yo' sympathetic ear. You see, you 're the only man in the county thet 's got a X-ray on my conscience—an' when I know you

discern foreign things floatin' 'roun' in it, why, I like to have a chance to explain how they got there. Seems sort o' small of a man o' yo' size to take advantage of a family's health an' make hisself scarce. I always enjoy company mo' when I 'm well than when I 'm sick, an' yet I don't no sooner git down in the mouth than you come a-prowlin' round with a pill and powder expression on yo' face.

S'pose you 've been out to the Simpkinses — to see ef the flutes is all prim in the old ladies' caps. They 's somethin' mighty pleasin' in the crystalizin' effect of old age in some. Now, them old maiden sisters ain't changed a ioto in any conceivable way for twenty-five year, an' here I 'm their senior by nearly a year an' ez variable ez a weather-vane an' ez open to conviction ez ever. Sometimes I think it 's my continual association with childhood, that an' my natural curiosity about every new thing thet turns up.

I s'pose ef they knowed about all our New York carousals, they 'd be turrible scandalized, but they 'll never know. We bought 'em both nice little presents from the north, exactly alike, of co'se, they bein'

twins, a pair o' revised hymn-books in big print. Mary Elizabeth did crave to fetch 'em a pair o' new style capes. She says them dolman shapes seem to confine their elbows an' yet, she hesitated to do it, they bein' heirlooms of cut jet.

To my mind, antiquated fashions set becomin' on the folks they 've grown old with. I wouldn't never 've varied my clo'es the way I have excep'n for these growin' child'en. I reckon they 'd be humiliated to have me dressed the way I 'd feel most at home in, whilst I 'd take especial delight in riggin' out like a cockatoo, ef it give them pleasure.

But I keep a-talkin' an' don't tell you what 's on my mind. I want you to see New York, ez much ez I can present to you, th'ough my old eyes — an' some of it is so dazzlin' thet I feel like ez ef you must see it shinin' th'ough me.

There 's that opera, now — what 's that you say? " Did we go to the opera? " Ain't I tellin' you about it, ez fast ez I can? Yas, we did, an' my private opinion is thet we seen *an' heerd* the most corrupt operatic performance thet ever was looked at by a set o' Christian people.

You see, Sonny, he charged Mary Elizabeth to see everything she had been interested in by hearsay, an' sence we 've had that talkin' machine, why the operatic singers is all household friends, so, she nachelly inclined to the opera, an' she consulted me, with all due respect an' timidity, an' I advised her to take a newspaper an' pick out the most correct-soundin' opera-play they advertised, which she done. In fact, she an' me, we picked it out together.

You see, most o' the opera-singers is these fureigners with sort o' heathenish names, an' the parts they play is open to criticism, but when she come to Mary Garden, why, we both seized upon it. Says she, "Now, that 's a good American name." Mary always does seem sort o' saintly, an' a garden, somehow it put us in mind o' the garden of Eden. So we picked her out that-a-way, an' then when we see she was engaged in a Bible play, why our decision was complete.

The play was entitled Salome, you ricollec' the daughter of Herodias, an' tell the truth, we both felt like ez ef we was goin' to a religious service. I got out my New Testament, an' we read the fo'teenth

chapter o' Matthew, all about how she danced befo' the king, an' we discussed the paganism of the ancient times, an' we resolved to go with reverent hearts to see the play played, an' half doubtful whether it was right to put such holy subjects on a theatre-stage.

Well, that was the sperit in which we went, but, ez I told you at the beginnin', ef I 'm any jedge of corruption, that so-called Bible opera-play is the limit. An' the pore misguided girl thet does the part of Salome, well, the truth is, I don't think I 'm competent to discuss it.

Of co'se, she was in a manner obligated to misbehave to the extent of rousin' the old king to all sorts o' brash vows, an' it may have seemed necessary for her to be about half stripped, to show them serpentine motions, but we was unprepared for sech exposure.

Of co'se, the words bein' all in French, an' sung at that which obscures their meanin' still more, we could n't be shore but maybe they was in a manner explanatory. But ef the words matched her conduct, the whole thing was consider'ble out o' the way. I felt like ez ef it might be my

duty to rise an' forfeit them five dollar seats, an' lead Mary Elizabeth out into the fresh air — that is, the best air we could git, in New York.

But I did n't. I 'd glance at her every little while, an' she seemed so untouched by it all, I thought, like ez not, the unreality of the singin' conversation an' the over wrought behavior of everything in sight would likely make it like a dream to her — an' so we set it out. An' now, I'm glad we did.

They thess took the Bible narration ez a stake to play around, an' they wove licentiousness into it, right an' left. F'instance, they tried to prove by visual perception thet the girl, Salome, had fell in love with John the Baptist, at first sight, an' her askin' for his head was for spite, at his rejection. He cert'nly did act a perfec' gentleman when she fairly thowed 'erself at him. He was, to my mind, the only one thet reely looked his part. I 'd 'a' knowed John, anywhere, not only by his raiment of camel's hair an' the leather girdle, but his look o' the wilderness an' the warnin' voice, all that was strictly scriptural. An' the scenery of the play,

why that was reely worth the entrance money — all the grandeur of the Eastern court, an' the high color which did n't have to be translated.

An'that "dance o' the seven veils," why, ef it had 'a' been danced by a little child, I 'd say it was one o' the most bewilderin' performances in the world. She shore is supple in the hinges, Mary Garden is, an' she must 'a' had consider'ble drillin' to be able to fling them veils exact, every time, a veil bein' about ez unmanageable a missile ez a person could try to throw at a mark.

I always liked a good game o' skill, an' I might 've got over them seven veils, ef she had n't acted so scandalous with John. An' — what you say, Doc'? "How about the audience?"

Well, I don't know ez the audience showed much mo' reticence than what Mary did, in a different way. It was a great sight, that immense half-moon o' chairs facin' the stage, all occupied by radiantly shinin' ladies, mostly, all mo' or less stripped.

"Respectable?" you say? Why, shore, that is, they was classed so — not only respectable an' wealthy, but high class, but —



An' so we set it out. An' now, I'm glad we did.

lean over here a minute, Doc', I can't speak this out loud, lessen Mary Elizabeth might git wind of it, but I want to say to you, both ez a friend an' family physician, thet whilst I set there, in that five dollar orchestral seat, an' borried Mary Elizabeth's little telescope an' surveyed that scenery of ladies occupyin' the front row of stalls right out in the glare of a thousand electric lights, it seemed to me I 'd never seen so many nursin' mothers together, in my life.

I ain't disposed to criticize an' I won't say they was intentionally brazen about it. It might 'a' been forgetfulness, or it might 'a' been conformity to Parisian style. Mary Elizabeth, she seemed to attribute it to Paris, an' she says they do say the Paris rule for functional dresses is "the fuller the scanter," in other words, "the higher the style, the lower the cut."

Of co'se, in all sech ez this, I 'd defer to the ladies theirselves, every time.

Mary Elizabeth, I could see thet she was mo' scandalized than what I was which was nachel enough. A person feels for her own sex. An' I did n't have no occasion to feel any too vainglorious about mine, neither, my pride in John's circumspection bein'

over-balanced by my shame in King Herod, the Tetrarch.

Any ol' man turned fool over a girl is a humiliatin' spectacle, an' I wish it was rarer 'n what it is. They ain't no better way for an ol' man to expose his decripitude than by contrast, an' yet, it's hard for a man in love to git far enough from his own folly to git any reasonable view of 'isself.

No, we did n't take the child'en, not to that. But Mary Elizabeth took Madge to a number o' matinee performances, to verify the Victor machine's performances. An' we all heard Harry Lauder sing, in his side-pleated skirt an' bare legs. I had to supply mountain scenery out o' my ol' head to make him appear allowable. We 've got sev'al pictures of Highlanders at home here, an' they 're all woods-surrounded. You see Madge is musical an' Mary Elizabeth, she never forgot it. She's had her voice tried — an' they bought some new records — an' I reckon they 's some ambitious plans bein' hatched out betwixt her an' her mother.

When I heerd the reel singers, Doc', an' reelized the exactitude of the mechanical

reproductions, I tell you, it set me a-thinkin'. All that musical an' emotional exactitude reproduced by the narrow pathway of a needle! Sech ez that makes me almost sorry I 'm old. It seems to me we 're on the ticklish verge of the full vision an' I 'd like to be here for the revelation.

You know, we come home partly by sea, Doc', from New York to New Orleans, an' the rest o' the way by the Southern Pacific an' Iron Mountain, an' what I have n't had a chance to observe ain't worth mentionin'.

But the wireless telegraph, that, to me, is the century's achievement — so far. You never know what some student workin' in retirement has discovered overnight. They 're like patent medicines an' mortgages — inventors are. They work while you sleep!

But the WIRELESS!

Think o' bein' in mid-ocean an' gittin' messages addressed to the different passengers from Squedunk an' Moravia, an' no visible disturbance o' the air, even!

The Wireless man, aboa'd ship, he an' me, we got to be great chums, an' he all but adopted little Doc'. You see, electricity is

a large part of our table conversation, sence the boys has been comin' along. An' these child'en have got all sorts o' electric contrivances, bells an' telephones, all about the place. Half the trees in our woods is mo' or less equipped with wires an' they ain't a tree-house nowhere but has its "system" in it, for some sort of experiment or harmless deviltry.

Well, it seems thet this man was n't used to sech child'en an' he was inclined to rate little Doc' ez a progidy, tel I told 'im about his older brother an' his pa.

It seems, Doc', thet they thess turn out messages promiscuous, an' only the properly attuned machines can ketch 'em. Why, right now, whilst you an' me are settin' here, the air must be filled with live messages rushin' in all directions, from Maine to ships in the Pacific, or Hong Kong to Key West, an' even whilst they fairly tickle our ears, we don't reelize 'em, because we ain't adjusted to 'em.

I'd like to focus what little mind I've got left on the production of automatic receivers — receivers thet would ketch all thet was goin', or, at least, all thet was fitten for us. That would come near the

attainment of divine power — an' my belief is thet it 's comin'. They 've dispensed with the wires an' the nex' thing will be dispensin' with the machines — an' by keepin' in tune with the infinite, we 'll be enabled to discern the currents of love an' affection from hearts in accord with ours, not only on earth but in Heaven. To my mind, that 'll be the dawnin' of the Perfect Day.

He was a polite young feller, that Wireless, an' mighty patient with my slow mind. I learned mo' of him in them five days at sea than I 'd imbibe, settin' here on my loved po'ch, in ten year with yo' visits so sca'ce — that is, mo' specified knowledge.

The sweet lessons of full an' tranquil life have come to me here, an' I would n't exchange it — but I rejoice to 've had this fresh illumination. I give the young man one o' Sonny's books, a signed one I happened to have aboa'd, an' you 'd 'a' been proud to witness his delight.

Why, he knows all about our Sonny. An' when he found out thet *he* was little Doc's father, you should 'a' seen him. Nothin' the little feller could 'a' said would 'a' surprised him, then.

What 's that you say? " I promised to tell you about seein' Sonny's books on sale? " Sure, I did. Seen people come up an' buy 'em, too, an' never let on. The first time we saw that was at the Waldorf. " Did we go to the Waldorf? " We 've been to New York, I tell you, Doc' — to New York, with Mary Elizabeth ez pilot, aided an' abetted by Sonny, eggin' 'er on by every mail to see the last sight.

Yas, we put up at the Waldorf over night, registered in the office — I thess put down my initial there. I did n't want to humiliate Sonny by writin' myself down " Deuteronomy Jones, Sr." Although it 's an old name, it seems to have a sort o' conspicuosity about it — so, I thess signed " D. Jones an' family."

Yas, we registered an' took a suite — that word 's pernounced *sweet*, Doctor. We took a sweet, I say, an' went up in it in the alleviator, eleven floors — an' we stayed over night, an' the two youngsters, they punched the buttons in the wall for every conceivable thing — an' the rest of 'em, they put their shoes out at night to be shined, all but me. No, I would n't do it. I was like the stranger in the castle who

was afeerd to resk settin' out his shoes, lessen they 'd be gilded. An' besides, I never want nobody else polishin' my boots. I like my own spit.

Well, we set in the Turkish room, an' we sauntered amongst the pa'ms, an' we took that day's dinner, at supper-time, in the main dinin'-room, all four of us at a little table together.

Then Mary Elizabeth, she 'lowed it would be nice for each one to order what he wanted, but they all lingered in indecision an' the list was long an' only partially intelligible. So, finally, she see a mighty nice, well-behaved lookin' party of four at the table catticorned away from us, an' they had thess give their order, an' so she says, says she to the waiter, "Thess duplicate their order for us, please, an' fetch it ez soon ez you can."

They was a mighty rigorous lookin' crowd for style, an' I couldn't help applaudin' Mary Elizabeth's wit in seein' thess what sech a party of average rich New Yorkers would order for a ordinary dinner.

Well, I wush-t you could 'a' seen that dinner, Doctor! I won't pertend to de-

scribe it to you, for it 's beyond my vocabulary. I know it cost thirty-one dollars an' thirty cents — an' I ricollec' Mary Elizabeth, she 'lowed afterwards thet she did n't see no trace o' the thirty-one dollars but she felt like thirty cents!

Yas, I know, it does seem a fabulous price, but you see, they was tarrapin for four, for one thing, an' high-class duck — for four — duck with the blood streamin' out of it so thet you had to hurry an' mix it with the red jelly to deceive yo'self into eatin' it. Then they was some kind o' round paddy-cakes of meat surrounded with br'iled toad-stools which I tried to summon sufficient fo'ce o' character to taste, an' did take on my plate. An', of co'se, they was the usual amount of ornamental tricksy sweet an' sour things, an' ice-cream which you unearthed from a hot chocolate sauce. That was nice, I must confess, an' Mary Elizabeth's delight in that one achievement was worth the price o' the whole dinner. She 's managed to git the recipe for that, somehow, an' we 've had it here, thess ez good ez the Waldorf's.

No doubt, it was a fine dinner, but when we had finished it, I hated to give extry

trouble, but I felt sort o' empty, not havin' partaken of much, an' I asked Mary Elizabeth ef she 'd be too much humiliated ef I was to order some pancakes an' syrrup an' a full-sized cup o' coffee, which I done. In fact, I got a pot o' coffee, an' drank it deliberate. That New York coffee, even at the big hotels, is inoffensive, an' I needed mild stimulation, leadin' the strenuous life the way we was.

Yas, ez I said, it was Sonny thet kep' a-writin' to Mary Elizabeth, eggin' 'er on to fetch home all sorts of New York experiences. He knowed she 'd enjoy tellin' 'er friends about the opera, an' the Waldorf, an' so she does. I notice, sence she 's come home, she don't resort to the curio-cabinet the way she used to, to make talk.

Yas, sence her backset with the last baby, when only yo' skill brought 'er th'ough the purple fever, Sonny, he 's mighty lenient an' indulgent todes 'er. An' you know his new book is in the ninth edition a'ready, so thet the family expenditures has come to be a matter of discretion mo' than of necessity.

Yas, we was all sorry for him not to 've been along, but you see, he 's busy on an-

other book, an' I tell you, Doc', the production of books bears consider'ble resemblance to child-bearin'. For the last ten years, I 've noticed that when Mary Elizabeth was n't gittin' ready for a baby, why Sonny would be confined with a book. You nee' n't to laugh. I 'm serious. He says he could n't no mo' leave a book half done an' go galivantin' than a hen could leave a settin' of eggs an' not know the life would be out of 'em, quick ez they got stone cold.

You see, life is life, an' the book that ain't got life in it ain't no good, nohow. He made a joke on that, Sonny did. He 's great on quiet jokes. He 'lowed thet nothin' could be expected to have circulation thet did n't have life — an', of co'se circulation is necessary for a book to do any good.

Yas, he 's still hard at it, although he 's got on mighty fast durin' the family exodus, so he says, although, from the number of surprises he 's planned an' executed for us durin' our absence, I 'd think that was all he did.

He says it was his only chance to administer absent treatment, an' he done it.

He treated me to this sep'rate po'ch on the sunny side o' my room an' my own bath-room with tiles in it. I reckon he 'lowed we 'd requi'e mo' luxury after we 'd seen the world. An' he 's got Mary Elizabeth a special bath 'j'inin' their room, likewise, an' a sun-parlor with a out-side place to sleep, an' a sort o' conservatorial annex, all on her floor, for her favorite plants. It seems, she had a suspicion of what he was doin' ez he wrote her she better select wall-papers in New York, ag'inst the time they 'd be ready to use 'em, an' she didn't lose no time. She even advised him where to store 'em away, all the time full o' laugh, knowin' he 'd have 'em hung, time she come home.

An' then, once-t awake, she described our Waldorf bath-room, an' 'lowed to him thet whenever she could affo'd it, she intended to have hers done like it, which was mo' of a knock-down than a hint, an' he tumbled.

Now, that sort o' absent treatment is to my taste. Of co'se when we come home, all the papers was up an' the parlor set recovered with the stuff she selected "for storage," an' of co'se, she bought a few

things to conform. But she ain't no reckless buyer. She goes slow an' sure.

But about Sonny's books, ez I was tellin' you, we was standin' close-t to the book-stand there at the Waldorf, that night we put up there, an' a young man come up an' what does he say but "Have you got 'Nature's Overcoats,' by Deuteronomy Jones"? I don't know why, but would you believe I suddenly had a sensation of goose-skin all over me, when I heerd it.

"Sure!" says the clerk, like ez ef he 'd 'a' been ashamed not to 've had it, an' I see him hand out the woods-colored volume an' take the dollar an' a half, an' when the man had started off, he turns back an' says he, "Any mo' of his books?" "All of 'em," says he, an' with that, he enumerated five, an' when he stopped, what does little Doc' do but chirp up, "Them ain't all. You forgot 'Thistles an' Armed Peace' an' 'The Dutchman's Pipe.'" "

Well, sir, I wish-t you could 'a' seen that man. He thess turned an' looked little Doc' over, an' I could see myself thet our little man looked consider'ble of a young country greenie, an' says he, "What do you know about those books, my man?" "

“ I reckon you ’d know about ’em,” says he, “ ef yo’ daddy wrote ’em! ”

Well, sir, with that he took the boy by the hand an’ he led him into the office an’ he called a crowd an’ they catechised the little feller, an’ when he come back, he was loaded up with candy an’ fruit, an’ —

What ’s that? Oh, no. I didn’t make myself known. I ’m considerate of Sonny, an’ I know I ’m thess a plain man. No, that was my absent treatment of him, not thet I think he ’d want me to feel that-a-way, an’ I ain’t over-afflicted with undue humility. Only, I ’d ruther meet strangers here at home, where I seem to fit my socket than in the glare of their electric lights.

I still have my pants cut by mother’s ol’ pattern, an’ when I ’m home, I don’t never think about it, but I often had my attention called to ’em, somehow, walkin’ the New York streets. The only man to give me comfort about my pants in New York was Abe Lincoln, an’ him through that stature, in one o’ the public squares. I reckon, like ez not, his wife made his.

Ain’t it wonderful, the way ease an’ comfort an’ a loose fit can be conveyed in hard bronze? Ef the time should ever

come when it might be interestin' to have statues of the father of Deuteronomy Jones, the nature-writer, I hope they 'll be satisfied with my bust. I 'd change my pants now for my livin' family, but I don't care to do it for posterity.

Yas, we 've had a great time, Doctor, an' while it has changed my views on a few subjects an' made me mo' lenient in some o' my jedgments, it ain't no ways disturbed the foundations o' my faith.

I ain't never been troubled with no very rigorous sectarian doctrines, ez you know, an' even ef I had been, I 'd 'a' had to widen out a little, after findin' so much good in all; an' I 'm prepared to take what I find wherever I find it, ef it 's genuine.

The fact thet you keep my rheumatism down the way you do with yo' ol'-fashioned alopathic salts an' ointments would n't prevent me lettin' a Christian Scientist aim any quantity of absent treatment at these j'int's which they declare ain't swole the way they seem to be to you an' me, an' I 'd take a mud bath or an electric shower or a sun-soak or a water-cure, ef their advocates seemed sane-minded an' did n't requi'e *me* to deny the evidence of my senses

which may be misguided, of co'se. But which in a good many things, seem to be faithful guides, so far ez they go.

I believe in absent treatment of the Scientists an' mind-healers to the extent of not abusin' 'em behind their backs. The avenues of the sperit don't seem to me to be limited to no one sect, an' it often seems to me thet one will git a-holt o' one side o' the truth an' one another, an' it takes 'em all to carry it along — or, maybe it does.

I can't help bein' thess a little on their side — I 'm a-talkin' about them absent-treaters, now — I say I can't help bein' on their side when the newspapers all jump on 'em when one o' their number dies. Thy seem to forget thet our ol' graveyards are full o' the patients of our reg'lar doctors.

What 's that, Doc'? “ Am I goin' over to 'em? ” Oh, no. But I want to treat 'em white, that 's all. Any sect thet dwells upon the beauty of holiness an' thet challenges every soul to find God in itself has got a great truth, an' there 's so much health an' well-bein' in that one reelization thet we might forgive 'em ef their heads

gits turned a little an' they become imbued with the idee that they 've got a corner on the Grace of God. Listen at me, quotin' terms from the stock-market! You see, Doc', they ain't the first sect that has considered itself especially divinely endowed, an' that sort o' delusion, ef it ain't carried too far, is a tower o' stren'th.

The thing that we seem to me to need most is to unite on our agreements more an' not dispute about our differences quite so much. I 've often thought thet at the last day the number o' sheaves we bring in might be mo' important than what kind o' scythe we cut 'em with.

Th' ain't no reputable religious demonination thet holds any doctrine opposed to brotherly love an' human helpfulness an' ef we keep busy with that, why we won't find much time to dispute about predestination or the Fo'teenth Amendment — I mean to say the Thirty-nine articles.

What 's that you say? " Did I know thet Ol' Mis' Bradley has laid aside her specs, all th'ough absent treatment? " Why, yas, I heerd somethin' about it. Lemme see. Sarah Jane is two years younger 'n what I am — an' I ain't had no

need o' specs for a long time. In my case, it 's second sight, the same thet my pa an' ma enjoyed, after they passed the sixty-nine mark, that, an' the *absence of treatment*. Our family eyes has always been reliable an' our sight ain't never been injured by no ambitious oculists.

“ Don't I b'lieve in oculists? ” Why, sure I do, an' I b'lieve in doctors, too, reg'lar doctors like you, but I 'm always happier when my relations with 'em are purely friendly.

An' surgery, it never had no appetizin' effect on me. I never like to think about a surgeon's implements. I've always thought thet all doctors ought to be divinely endowed with a sort o' professional second sight, an' then they wouldn't be liable to err.

I never have been able to forgit that doctor thet put a patient to sleep with chloroform an' then took out the wrong eye — an' scissors is bein' sewed up in unconscious humans every day o' the week, ef we are to believe the papers. I've sometimes thought thet Dave Baily's wife might 'a' had sev'al pairs sewed up in her, durin' all them operations she loves to talk

about, an' maybe that 's why she 's so contrary an' argumentative.

No, I 'll take my doctors sociably, whenever I can. They 's nothin' I like so much ez to see yo' horse comin' down the road an' to know I 'll have the pleasure of settin' down, like this, an' listenin' to yo' talk.

What 's that you say? " Ain't our second boy thinkin' about studyin' medicine? " Cert'n'y he is, an' with my entire approval. He ought to 've been yo' namesake. He got the idee from you, an' I approve of his so'ce of inspiration.

Some things are necessary evils — an' doctors seem to be one of 'em, doctors an' " healers " which of co'se is an interchange of terms. Ef you ain't considerable of a healer, you ain't got no business to be a doctor. I never could git at the consistency of that word among the Christian Scientists, though.

Ef they ain't no sech a thing ez disease, I can't exactly see what they profess to heal. Ef it 's error, an' error is illness, then —? But, of co'se I 'm antiquated an' maybe slow-minded. I was so curious thet I paid a five dollar bill for a soft-covered

copy of Science an' Health, an' I don't say it ain't *science*, but it ain't *healthy*, not for me.

It's like sayin' the apostles creed an' the ten commandments backward — to me — the way we've been told to do to git to sleep. You can't say it ain't all there, but — well, I found it innocent enough. The only thing was I had n't been sufferin' insomniuously, an' did n't exac'ly need it. But for them thet need soothin', I'd ricommend it cheerfully.

An', when all is said an' done, we have to confess it holds a great truth an' that 's why it 's got sech a holt on some people. It seems to me to be an ancient truth, one o' the very oldest, a leetle fantastic in the way it 's put, maybe.

Of co'se, our doctors an' preachers, they don' take to it. None of us don't like to be interfered with. But it has smoothed out some anxious faces in this neighborhood, an' ain't turned nobody vicious, an' that 's somethin'.

Ef it had n't did no mo' 'n to set po' ol' lame Tillie Fay dancin', I'd give it credit. What's that? Well, s'pose she does hobble thess the same! She says that 's only

reminiscent of error, an' she does look so happy! Give the devil his due, Doctor. You 've treated Miss Tillie for thirty odd year, an' I 'm not criticizin', but you never set 'er dancin'!

Yas, ez you say, Po' Molly Skinners did commit suicide in a spell of enthusiasm in it, but you ricollec' little Elsie Seaman jumpin' into Bramble bayou, from over-study, preparin' for 'er graduatin', an' none of us can ever forgit our saintly little Mary Ellen Williams losin' 'er mind over that scoundrel jiltin' 'er at the altar, never turnin' up. Anything thet gets too much mastery over a mind is liable to th'ow it over.

I 've often thought thet one o' St. Paul's most useful precepts was moderation an' temperance in all things. The trouble with us humans is thet we run so to extremes thet the very word *temperance*, itself, has come to stand for intemperate abstinence.

Mo' than one man had upset middlin' good minds, goin' looney over inventin' perpetual motion thet they couldn't invent. An' I ain't shore thet our Sonny ain't amusin' 'isself now over some sech machinism, in his garret workshop. He an'

the blacksmith has consider'ble secrets together an' he 's always fetchin' in some new contraption. But I ain't oneasy about him, because I know he don't run to intemperance.

Who is that drivin' by, Doctor? Nev' mind yo' specs, I see. It's Jim Toland's buggy with his third boy in it. I'm feerd Jim's porely. He sends the boys so often when he used to go hisself.

Talk about seein'! Why I can discern the hue o' my red drawer th'ough the mesh o' this homespun on my kneecap, ez no glasses ever revealed it.

An' I see other things mo' clair, too, Doc'. I often seem to see beyond appearances, these later days, an' lookin' th'ough the criss-crossin' of some o' the troubled faces I've known so long, an' mo' or less misjudged, I see deep waters of patience an' silent endurance. Why, I've discovered mo' than one clair lake of peace in the waitin' soul of an ol' black man with a face ez wrinkled an' brown ez a raisin.

But most of all, I see beauty. Everywhere I look, it seems to be distributed. Of co'se, it has always laid thick along our country lanes an' over our hills. We sow

it an' water it an' gether it, an' oftentimes unknowin'ly. Yas, I have a feelin' thet when we git ol' age's second sight, ef we 'll open our souls to the vision, we 'll find many a revelation of beauty thet 's withheld from the eager eyes of youth. An' with that an' the wireless messages of love thet come to us, even from the Beyond, I ain't shore but old age is the most blessed season in life, ez well ez the richest.

VIII

LIGHT



AS, that 's thess what I said, doctor. These three weeks of so-called darkness, instid o' bein' an eternity of affliction, have seemed more like a full revealment of light. An' now, with them bandages off'n my eyes, I take a new joy in seein' clairly into the faces of affection thet had been gradually recedin' from me.

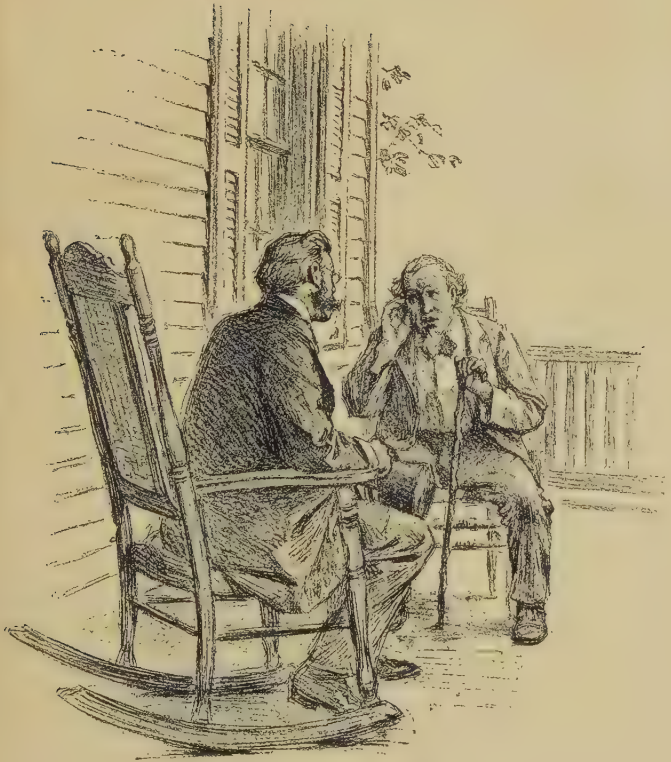
Our young home-doctor, ez we call our boy student, he had a'ready diagonozed them cobwebs thet I kep' vainly tryin' to bresh away from my vision, an' he was extry tender to me, ef that 's possible. But he never named it to me. I reckon a reg'lar diagonozier 'll be a great safe-t-guard in the family.

An' then, when you said the word "Cat-arac'" to me, I wonder do you ricollec' how I turned my dumb face to you in wonderment?

“Catarac’” thinks I to myself, “That’s a waterfall, a catarac’ is, an’ the pore ol’ doctor, he thinks my sight is bein’ drenched out with secret tears.”

An’, ef you remember, when I got my speech, I remarked to you thet I had never been much habituated to weepin’ an’ then the thought come to me thet like ez not the catarac’ thet you discerned, ef it was a catarac’, might ‘a’ collected by suppression — a sort o’ dimmin’ o’ the vision by the wellin’ up o’ back-waters of tears thet did n’t git shed. They ‘s boun’ to be a-plenty o’ them, you know, doc, in every deep life. An’ so I thought thet like ez not the surgeon’s knife might be needed to turn ‘em into specified channels scientific, without drowndin’ out all adjacenin’ functions.

An’ then I said to you, after consider’ble of a reflective pause, said I “Go ahead with yo’ dreem, doctor, an’ maybe the swamp may be redeemed.” But I confess I said it more in resignation than in hope. An’ after that, all them cobwebs seemed mo’ like sea-weed to me — an’ I dreaded the undertow o’ the great waters overcomin’ me, when you ‘d cut down the dam.



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Do you ricollec' how I turned my dumb face to you in wonderment?

It 's strange how the nearly-blind dread the full dark. Why, when my vision had got so low thet it was little mo' than a discernment of daylight viewed th'ough a tangle, I cherished that little glimmer like ez ef it had 'a' been full sight — even more, I believe, havin' sampled the deprivation.

But when it come — the so-called black period — the season of bandages an' patience thet I 'd been coward enough to dread so — when the gate of strivin' was shet an' peace settled down over an' about me like a soft-winged bird, bless yo' sweet life, I was n't requi'ed to set in no gloom. Not on yo' life!

I expected it, but —

Well, from the time o' the ordeel to now, seem like either they was somethin' doin' every minute or else I was thess steeped in repose.

First thing I ricollect of was a little weariness an' sleep, an' from that on, the only reel closin' of night aroun' me was whilst I 'd be in slumber.

You see, doctor, with all its blessedness, sight is mo' or less of an interference, the way it keeps trivial things befo' a person's eyes. I 've often been recalled from sper-

itual visions, in my clair-eyed days, by views of triffin' things. Why, a cow in the garden trompin' down fifteen cents worth o' sweet peas has more 'n once-t obliterated great vistias of vision when my soul would seem to perceive the glimmer of streets of gold an' jasper gates — right here on this po'ch.

You see, I 've set here in meditation a good many years, sence Life offered me this chair an' surrounded it with affection. Of co'se, sight 's handy in gittin' about an' I ain't one to make cheap of it. A man in the world has a deprived life without it, even ef he don't feel called to choose a wife. An' even in my retirement, I welcome its return.

But ez I say, seem like quick ez daylight was fully bandaged out, I was allowed a special dispensation of light. An' tell the truth, it affo'ded me the first chance-t I 've had to go back over cherished scenes without interruption. Them first days when you did n't allow no conversation in the room, an' I 'd hear you whisper that one word "temp'ature," why they was days of lively joy in which I 'd walk th'ough halls of light an' stroll over green fields an'

medders, sometimes fairly skippin' in merry recovery of my boy-hood.

I suspicion I must 'a' been keyed up consider'ble for I ricollec', although I 'd reco'nize the whisperin' *voice*, that word "temp'ature" would sound like suppressed thunder and after a while it seemed about seven foot tall an' I reco'nized it ez a pompious policeman, same ez them rigid ones at the New York street corners — only, instid o' that various outlook an' the jesticulatin' arms, my policeman would keep his finger on his lip — an' the name, "Temp'ature," why it run clean aroun' his cap, so you could see the ends from behind.

An' I soon come to like him. He seemed to keep all the crossways clair of interruptions in the journeys I 'd make, so I could think in peace.

That 's the way it seemed to me, but no doubt I was imaginative whilst I was over-het with fever. But that soon passed off an' one day the policeman broke into a smile — an' then I knowed it was a dream — an' he seemed to go out, like a candle. An' he never come back.

An' then the heavenly days of peace

ensued. No mo' skippin' an' tree-climbin' — or high-strung acrobatteries, but thess sailin' along between downy clouds of forgetfulness an' miraculous disclosures of light sech ez I never expected to see revealed this side o' Heaven.

You know, Doc', light has always had a great place in my life — thess light — an', first an' last, it has give me some great experiences.

Whilst I was in a manner depreciatin' eye-sight, thess now, don't imagine thet I was extollin' darkness. I only want to differentuate external eye-sight from visions o' the soul — and to git you to reelize thet the blind don't need to abide in gloom an' I think I 've proved it.

An' takin' it all in all, the radiance o' these dark days has exceeded all the experiences of light of my long life-time. An', of co'se, some o' the best o' the sights was reproductions — I don't deny that. An' when I finally come to the time of release, an' the moment arrived when I opened my eyes to recovered vision, well — ef Heaven itself is any sweeter, Doc, I 'm afeard I 'll never be able to stand it on earth.

Of co'se, it was a great occasion, when

the bandages was to be lifted, an' Mary Elizabeth an' Sonny, they was bidin' beside me — an' the first word I heerd was "Yes, father," in two voices, an' the daughterly hand a-smoothin' my old bald-spot whilst Sonny stiddied my wrist.

You see, they was bracin' me ag'inst possible disappointment. An' the pillers was soft under my neck. They had opened up the winders into the trees, choosin' the twilight for its mild light; an' between the chirpin' o' the birds an' a katidid or two an' the smell o' the maginolias, seemed to me all the heavenly fo'ces was combined to bring me resignation.

An' then, when in place o' that, I was allowed to give thanks for sight restored, seemed like my cup o' happiness thess trickled over the whole place an' it ain't dried out yet.

I was regretful thet you could n't be there, along with the ocular doctor — thess for companionship.

Yas, ez I said, a heap o' my life's greatest experiences has been depicted to me in light. Did I ever tell you, I wonder, about the miraculous vision in which *she* was first revealed to me? No, I know I ain't,

'cause I ain't never told nobody. It sounds so highflown, I 'm most afeard to tell it to you, even now, an' yet —

The fact is I 've so recently seemed to see it all over ag'in thet it 's freshly real to me an' I don't know ez I can hold it ag'inst yo' usual curiosity.

It 's everlastin'ly romantic an' highflown, doctor — an' maybe it 'll reveal an unsuspected side o' my home-spun character, but ef I 'm ever goin' to tell anybody, I reckon now 's the time an' place — an', of co'se, you 've been my one lifelong confidant.

I ricollec' allowin' to you once-t befo' thet fallin' in love with her come to me like a clap o' thunder out of a clair sky but I did n't go into the little minutias of it.

It 's all thess ez clair to me today ez it was then an' I feel newly equipped to describe it to you.

You ricollec' that ol' culvert thet used to be between sour swamp an' Jim Tolland's rice medders? Well, one day, it must 'a' been about the — Yas, it was seventh day of May an' every feathered thing nestin'. A lot of us boys was standin' roun' the post office door waitin'

for Miss Cordelia to sort out the mail — thess befo' sunset, it was. Most o' the old crowd was there — Sonny Simpkins an' Jim Dooley — Jim was waitin' on one o' the Simpkins twins then. Pore Jim! He died befo' he signified which one — an', of co'se, Bud Zunts, he was there, waitin' tel the last one, ez usual. 'T was n't long befo' him an' Miss Cordelia up an' married.

Well, we was all waitin' an' chaffin' each other ez usual when I chanced to look up an' I see what appeared to be a girl on fire, standin' on the arch o' the culvert, ag'inst the sunset. I wish-t I had descriptive language to image it to you, doctor. It was like a sort o' transformation, not to say transfiguration.

You would n't believe thet a mortal could 'a' lit up the way she done, lessen you took into consideration the flamin' sunset behind 'er an' the color of her hair which, with all its modesty, had consider'ble blood pulsatin' th'ough it. An' I recollec' distinc', she had on a sort o' thin, reddish organder lawn, mo' thin than red; but, sir, with the sun th'ough it, what I saw from the post office door was a sainted martyr, enveloped in flames, an' I thought

of Joe Ann of Ark, the way I see 'er once-t in a play performance thet come down from St. Louis.

I ricollec' I was curious to know what section o' the state of Arkansas Joe Ann come from, in ancient days, for the master of ceremonies, he told us she was historic. But, of co'se, in hearin' the children their lessons, I 've picked up consider'ble, an' I 've been glad I never put the question.

But anyhow, ez *she* stood on the culvert, facin' the other way an' lookin' off into the sky, for about a minute I was superstitious an' half looked for her to dissolve into the red behind 'er — an' she would n't 'a' been no more to me all my life than one o' the figgurs I 've seen form an' crumble in the coals.

But I stood there entranced, ez you might say, an' I did n't glance at none o' the boys because, tell the truth, I did n't *dast*. I mistrusted thet they saw what I saw or ef I reely saw it, myself.

The entire sweep o' the west was a mericle of sunset an' I 'm always still-mouthed in the presence of sky-splendor like that.

But whilst we all stood an' looked, d'rec'ly Jim Toland, he says, thess casual,

whittlin' a althea tooth-stick ez he said it, says he:

“ Wonder what Still-one 's doin', standin' there on that culvert, lookin' up that-a-way? ” That was a nickname the boys had for 'er, “ Still-one,” thess on account o' her bein' sort o' sparse on idle conversation.

“ Who? ” says I, knowin' full well who he was obliged to mean, an' havin' that minute reco'nized 'er myself.

“ Why,” says he, not payin' no attention to my fool question, “ She 's turned back — an' she 's comin' this way.”

An' shore enough, she was. An' all the way down, she walked clothed in flame, tel she struck the shade o' the Cherokee hedge — an' until I see 'er face in the shade, I never fully reelized 'er ez human, although I knowed too well who she was.

An' when she come down to where we stood, Jim Toland, he says to 'er, says he:

“ Forgit somethin', Marthy? ”

“ Thank you, Jim,” says she, an, with that, she wheeled around an' started straight back without another word.

Well, that incited my curiosity an' so I up an' puts in:

“ An’ why did n’t you thank me, too, Miss Marthy? ” I did n’t know ’er then quite ez familiar ez what Jim did.

Well, at that, her face turned ez red ez her recent garments an’ says she, castin’ down ’er eyes,

“ I only thanked Jim for what he done for me.”

“ What has Jim done thet I ain’t? ” says I. “ He ain’t lef’ my side.”

“ He loosened my tongue for me,” says she, smilin’ like a veritable seraphim. An’ then she went on to explain:

“ Whilst I stood on the culvert thess now, I made a wish to the ‘ first star I see this night,’ an’ of co’sse, after that, I dares n’t speak tel I was spoke to — less ’n I ’d break the wish — An’ it ’s one I don’t want hoodooed.” Reddenin’ all over ag’in ez she said it.

An’ with that, I butted in ag’in. Says I: “ Ain’t that May Day comin’ acrost the culvert now? She could ’a’ spoke to you first, ef you ’d waited.”

“ Yas, I know, *but she might n’t*,” says she. “ I saw her comin’, an’ that ’s why — ” An’, sir, with that, she was turned round an’ gone. An’ me, follerin’

'er figure ez she went along in the shade o' the hedge, discerned 'er ez a saint.

You ricollec', that was thess after poor little May Day's misfortune an' lots of our older women would pass 'er on the boa'd-walk an' look the other way.

Well, sir, you could 'a' knocked me down with a feather. We stood an' watched 'er tel she met May Day on the Culvert. The sun had settled pretty low by then, but it give us them two child'en in clair outline — one head, fire-lit, a glory of red, an' held high, an' little May Day's fair an' yaller, but bent down in humility. Poor little May Day always had a innocent lookin' little head.

Well, sir — ez the two stood there, I see Marthy's hand go out to May Day an' she drawed 'er close-t beside 'er an' they stood still, lookin' at that star together, an' like ez not, Marthy was recitin' the wish-verse to 'er — leadin' 'er troubled mind into girlish playfulness an' hope.

Well, that was the beginnin' of my insomnious nights. I did n't sca'cely shet my eyes that night nor the next nor the next an' I could n't make head nor tail o' my own sessations for a long time. Every-

thing seemed stopped within me, an' I thess seemed to be gropin' th'ough life like a fool, for the want o' sense.

I s'pose every mortal man thet discovers he 's fell in love with a saint accuses hisself that-a-way — an' most men does, one time or another.

Well, Doc, it was five weeks, I ricollec', befo' I got shet o' the ha'nt o' the flamin' saint an' could reelize 'er ez simply human, — *an' possibly within reach.*

An' then, of co'se I got courage — an' some new neck-ties — an' started to walk beside 'er an' talk superior whilst I felt inferior to the occasional cocklebur thet would attach itself to the ruffle of her gownd.

Me bein' so much older, that gi'e me a sort o' purchase on the situation. Seems she had looked up to me for a long time ez a person to be respected. I was sort o' stalwart shouldered an' owned good horses but I was always monst'ous hombly an' conscieus of it in feminyne society.

Still, she lookin' up to me the way she done an' acceptin' my opinions ez final, why it gi'e me a sort o' eloquence ez we walked an' loosened up my vocal cords.

Ricollec', I finally asked 'er one day — after I had told 'er about Joe Ann of Ark an' the pantomime in the sunset an' how whilst she was wishin' to a star, she looked like ez ef she was listenin' to voices like the girl in the show an' then, summonsin' all my courage, I asked 'er ef she could ricollec' what she had wished on the culvert that night thet was so important, an', sir, she flushed up an' then she paled — an' without her openin' her lips, she had imparted to me the requisite amount of assurance an' nothin' but the stoppage o' my breath held back my proposal o' marriage, then an' there.

It was a convenient place, too, down by the mill-dam in maginolia lane thess where you come out o' the lane an' view the mill-pond where them chiny-trees with the seats is — an' the moon, it was friendly, too, half-veiled in white nubia clouds — an' there was a skift there — an' me a strong oarsman.

But, with everything favorable that-away I thess seemed to lose every faculty on earth exceptin' a sense of paralysis an' suffocation.

But I wrote it out that night, formal, an'

handed it to 'er myself next day. It was n't much of a letter although it was the seventeenth I worked out that night. I know because I burnt sixteen attempts when it was done. It was simple enough but unmistakable, an' I was afeard to resk it in the mail, lessen it might set the post office afire ef it did n't git mislaid.

Well — ez I love to say, Doc, we had a happy life together, an' a full one, mother an' me.

An' that was the way life's top meracle was revealed to me — in light. An' endurin' all these years whilst I've bided here on my po'ch an' grandfathered her descendants an' mine ez they've gradyally populated the playground under the oak yonder, why, they's been times when I'd seem to recall snatches of that scene of enchantment over the culvert.

But it was reserved for the one period of so-called darkness to reveal the whole vision to me again, entire, an' it was like renewin' my youth.

Yas, it has been a great experience in the recovery of —

What's that you say, doctor? "Memory?"

Well, yas, an' no. Maybe 'tis memory — memory, an' more. Things remembered always seem to me to return in a sort o' procession — but all this seemed more like pictured visions presented to the eyes o' the sperit. They could n't have no connection with my bodily eyes an' they bandaged.

Why, even the white moonlight of Sonny's birth-night of that long-ago Christmas has come back to me vivid in these bandaged weeks — with all the stillness an' wonder of it — an' the reelization of the Christ-child, too.

Of co'se, in many of my sweetest excursions in the way of light, our little Doc would seem to be beside me.

I don't claim thet his dear sperit has ac-chilly hovered about me, although I ain't shore. You know, in life he dearly loved the back o' my chair an' his favoryte retreats was all in speakin' distance — an' 't ain 't supposable thet his nature would change entire all of a sudden.

It seems strange, after all these years of uninterrupted growth an' prosperity, for Death to 've come to our door — an' made his claim.

It 's brought the other side mighty near to me, doc — an' the little grave beside hers is sometimes like a call to me — an' I know it 's all right. But I do miss him scand'lous — the plucky little man — an' I often recall the talks we 'd have out here when he 'd argue with me an' lay off his pernouncements on any subject so final with them little thin wrists.

You ricollec', I used often to compare him to a bird — with them wiry little legs an' hands an' the way he 'd perch anywhere an' sing — an' his friendliness with trees. An' they was times when he seemed to feel sort o' kinhood with birds, hisself.

Ricollec' how he talked about j'inin' the birds in their carols in the tree-tops, Christmas a year ago? An' after that, one day he says to me, says he, "Gramper," says he, "my soul 's got wings — an' better look out! Some nights when the moon 's still an' I hear the cherubims a-bimmin' away in the high-skies, an' all the choruses is filled out but my little part, I feel somethin' ticklin' my shoulders! "

An' then, lookin' straight at me, says he, "But I don't want to leave you, gramper — so when I feel the wings start a-flap-

pin', I hold on tight to the furnitures an' grab yo' neck — an' you think I 'm thess affectionin'." An' then he laughs, the little mite, an' says he, " I ain't got much of a voice, nohow — *not the way it comes out*. But when I *think* my songs *they're* *bully*." Then says he, " They 'll thess have to wait up there."

I 'd think he 'd been over-wrought by too rigorous religious instruction ef I did n't know better.

No — it was meant to be so. He was always partly removed, so thet his little feet never seemed fully on the earth.

What 's that you say? " Mary Elizabeth " ? Oh, Doc, I can't express it to you — the way she an' Sonny met it. Of co'se they 're constituted different, him an' her. She might 'a' give way exceptin' for the need of sustainin' him — an' directin' the children's minds Heavenward.

But they 's a look in both their faces sence this reverent surrender, like ez ef they 'd seen God.

What 's that you say? " Mournin' clothes? "

No, indeed — she ain't clothed 'er household in gloom.

How could she, an' his happy sperit passed upward in joy an' the purity of childhood?

No, Sally Ann, she sent over a lot o' black dresses, assorted sizes, thet she 'd gleaned from the neighbors, for 'is little funeral. Of co'se, it was kindly meant, but to our thinkin', it would 'a' seemed like sac'elege — in the face of faith.

Yas, ez you say, it was sweet for it to be Easter Day when we laid him away. The old cemetery was all joyous in its first resurrection green an' matin' birds called to each other from the trees on the slope where we made his little bed. An' the town child'en, they united with ours in fillin' an' surroundin' it with flowers, befo' they went home an' put on their little white frocks.

It was a scene of heavenly peace an' beauty when the low sun lit it up. An' it 's all right, doctor — an' I ain't dishonorin' it with no rebellion.

But — ef I thess did n't miss 'im so!

Yas, they 've planted some trees there special an' Sonny has put in a wrought-iron chair for me — an' I go, occasional, with the child'en, an' set there. But I

don't need to. Companionship with the dear dead ain't a question of here nor there with me. But it 's sweet for the child'en — an' conduces to reverence. It seems to give death a place in life, which is right.

Seems to me they 's a little difference in all the child'en sence he 's went. An' they 's a new look in their young faces — an' it ain't no cloud, neither. It 's a new light, an' heavenly.

I 've often wished I had yo' fluency of speech with a pen, doctor. I can write an audible hand enough, ef I could think o' the words, but thess the idee of pen an' paper has power to frustrate my thoughts all out o' shape.

An' think o' me bein' the father of a nachel book-writer!

I 've sometimes imagined thet maybe they might be the makin' of a book in me, or likely it would n't be no mo 'n a pamphlet — thess puttin' down the thoughts the Lord has sent to me here on my po'ch in amongst the vines, in all these years — ef I could write it out straight.

Yas, they 's other things besides bumblebees an' hummin' birds thet 's come in to me here out 'n a clair sky — comfortin'

thoughts, like peace doves, have flown in to me.

An', ez I 've said befo', even when I was requi'ed to go down into the valley o' the shadders, it was n't one of gloom to me.

I 've always been given a reelization thet every shadder is shaped in light — not thet that fully explains the benediction of the peace which we are told “*passeth understandin'.*”

THE END.



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